The Shooting Times and Country Magazine—May 24, 1957

SUNBURNT PASTURES

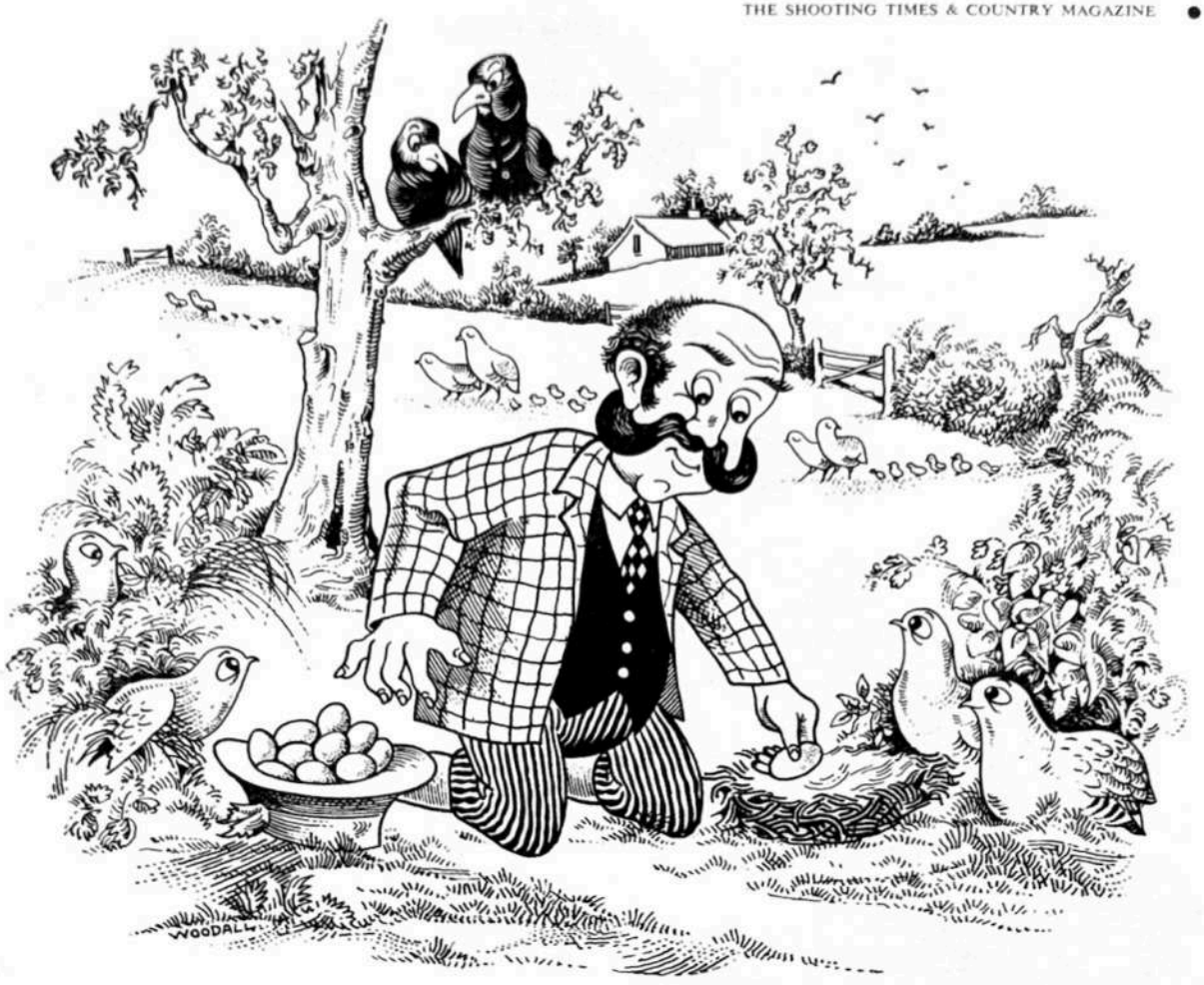
by Alan Savory

The SHOOTING TIMES

and Country Magazine

SEVENTY-FIFTH YEAR | FRIDAY, MAY 24th, 1957 | 1s. 3d. WEEKLY

WEED - CUTTING



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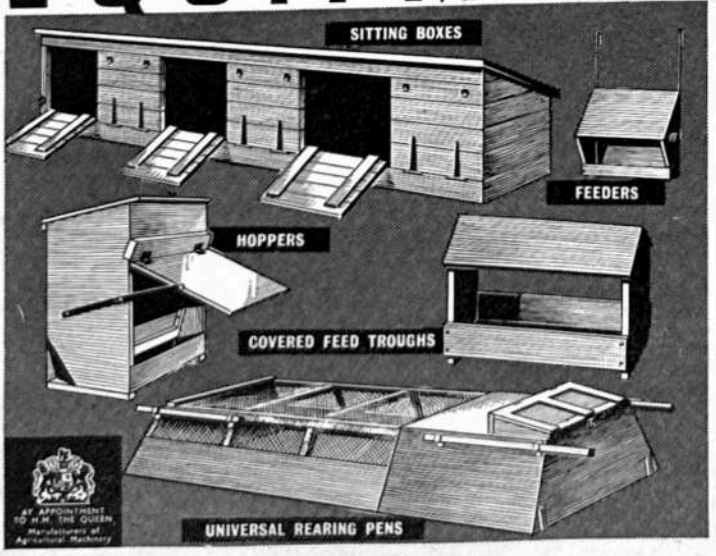

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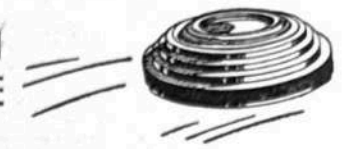

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Air-Rifle Menace

THE report of a recent meeting of the West Sussex County Council spotlighted a problem which has been causing increasing concern in recent years. The meeting supported the view that the "law of the gun" in the hands of children had become a serious menace to present day society.

This problem is no new one. With alarming regularity there appear in the Press reports of damage to humans, livestock and property because of the careless and often wanton use of guns and especially air rifles and pistols by minors, and at the meeting referred to, the Excise Licences Committee reported that in the past year, of 60 offences of carrying a gun without a licence, 40 were committed by juveniles.

It should be unnecessary to remind readers that the Firearms Act 1937, does not apply to smooth-bore shotguns, airguns or air-rifles To carry and use these weapons outside a house or its "curtilage" a gun licence is required, but this is no insurance against irresponsible use, and as the law stands, children can obtain gun licences and carry lethal weapons without hindrance. Moreover, accidents can even occur within a "curtilage."

For the increasing gun-accident rate amongst minors it is easy and convenient to blame the parents. In many cases also, it is justifiable, for regrettably few parents are as "gun conscious" as they should be. And this applies not only to town dwellers, but also to country families where it has always been supposed that the head of the family should know better.

As we pointed out in the May 3 issue, there is no shortage of keen young shots, but there is a shortage of opportunity for learning in the right way and of instruction in the old tradition and too often nowadays a youngster is allowed to run loose with a gun before he should even ever be permitted to handle one.

Another reason suggested for the decline in responsible gun handling, is the modern minor's outlook on the "tougher" side of life. "We live," said the chairman of the Excise Licences Committee, "in a crazy Davy Crockett age, where films are tame if 20 people aren't killed every 15 minutes."

What can be done with licences, it is asked, when the root of the trouble is the film and the comic strip. Television is criticised for showing unsuitable films and even Children's Hour programmes are described as "pernicious." Progress made by education is constantly being undermined by other, outside influences.

The effect of all this concern displayed is that local authorities are in search of a remedy and realising that, in spite of protestations neither Hollywood nor other branches of entertainment nearer home are likely to modify programmes that have popular appeal, their obvious step is to make strong representations for stricter gun licence laws which might stipulate a minimum age for the holders of such licences.

Whether further legal restrictions would meet with the approval of shooting men is open to doubt. Indubitable, however, is the fact that unless parents, schools and other bodies concerned with the education of the young do their utmost to instil into their charges the dangers of irresponsible gun-handling, and take strict measures to control them, other sterner controls may be considered necessary.

THE SHOOTING TIMES AND COUNTRY MAGAZINE

Official Organ of THE WILDFOWLERS' ASSOCIATION OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

No. 3898 FRIDAY, MAY 24, 1957 Founded 1882

The wild life of today is not ours to dispose of as we please. We have it in trust. We must account for it to those who come after.—King George VI.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Peakirk Waterfowl Gardens

Details of the Peakirk Waterfowl Gardens, which might be described as a second Slimbridge, are contained in the recently published annual report of The Wildfowl Trust.

Peakirk is a small village on the edge of the Lincolnshire Fens. Here eleven acres of land are being laid out under the personal direction of Mr. Peter Scott and Mr. Johnstone (Curator at the New Grounds), and all the lessons that have been learnt in the keeping of rare wildfowl at Slimbridge being put into operation at the outset. Ponds have been dug;Mr. Scott, treading in the steps of Capability Brown, has "landscaped the gardens; and a first-class collection of waterfowl from all over the world is being established there. When all is ready, eastern England is likely to possess the second largest waterfowl collection in the world.

The Trust hopes that this will extend the scope of the pleasure and interest which the collection of birds at Slimbridge has already given to nearly a million people at first hand and to many millions on television. It is planned that these new gardens shall assist the Trust to ensure the future of Borough Fen Duck Decoy, of which the Trust has taken a lease. This decoy, one of the oldest in England, built about 1640, will thereby have its future secured, and will be used by the Trust for its experiments in ringing ducks and migration studies.

International Bird Preservation

The annual report for 1956 of the British Section of the International Committee for Bird preservation, shows that the need for the work of the International Committee becomes even more evident and its value more widely appreciated. Founded 34 years ago, the Committee can now count National Sections in 45 countries, the latest to join being the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. The activities of the British Section during 1956 have been varied and successful and among the matters dealt with in the report are the campaign to prevent oil pollution of the sea; preservation of wildfowl; and protection of birds of prey, especially the need for better education of public opinion with regard to the function of these birds.

At a meeting of the European Continental Section of the Committee held in Holland in June 1956, attended by the representatives of 11 countries, a number of problems were discussed and it was evident that each country is dependent on others in order to pass and maintain protective measures, and that to ensure the preservation of birds international collaboration is imperative.

Copies of the report may be obtained 2/6 post free, from the Secretary I.C.B.P., British Section, c/o Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London, S.W.7.

Mourning Dove Research Scholarship

Creation of a mourning dove research scholarship at the University of Texas by the Welder Wildlife Foundation symbolises the growing realisation that these colourful migratoray birds are of considerable importance to the nation's outdoorsmen, the Wildlife Management Institute reports. It also symbolises the American way of conservation.

The initial purpose of the research project will be to determine and analyse "dove density and nest production" factors. The scholarship carries an annual stipend of $2,400, and an additional $500 is provided for travel expenses incurred by the student in connection with his research. Field studies will be conducted on the unique Welder Wildlife Refuge at Sinton, Texas.

As I mentioned earlier in these Notes, shooting men of 29 states bagged nearly 19 million mourning doves during the 1955 season, fully six million more than all duck bagged during the same year. As the Wildlife Management Institute puts it, a wildlife resource of this magnitude demands the best in management.

Hydro-Electric Waters

I hear that the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board, in keeping with their policy of assisting anglers and improving fishing facilities, have now completed their trout stocking programme for 1957 in consultation with the local angling interests.

Loch Faskally, the reservoir formed by the dam at Pitlochry, has been stocked with 2,000 yearling trout; Loch Tarsan, formed by the dam at the Board's Cowal (Argyllshire) scheme, with 3,000 yearlings; Lussa Loch in Kintyre (Argyllshire) with 3,000 yearlings, and Loch Benevean, part of the Board's Affric scheme, in Inverness-shire, with 3,000 yearlings.

Since 1951 a total of 111,800 yearlings, 10,000 two-year-old trout and 34,000 trout fry have been put into the Board's reservoirs.

AUCEPS.

A sparrow-hawk and young—not on the rough shoot sanctuary!

Rough Shoot Sanctuary

by Tower-Bird

THERE is a spot—a farm of fairly limited acreage—to which I repair on those spring and summer evenings when I feel like a quiet walk-round, a sit-me-down, and the odd shot at pigeon and vermin. It is seldom that I bother about the arable part of the place, except occasionally to slip round the hedges and the two belts of fir-trees to keep them clear of the nests of vermin birds. Usually I go straight to the few acres which lie rough and hidden between a triangular shelter of high hedges, two sides of which are studded by young elms; the other by a short base of very tall ones.

Inside this triangle lies an ornithologist's and perhaps a botanist's minor paradise, consisting of bramble-covered stone quarries (or, rather, pits); the roughest of rough coarse-grass meadow rapidly being strangled by large patches of creeping brambles and nettle-beds, the feet sinking into cushions of wild herbs that give off a scent as though every tom cat from the cottages below in the valley used this as a lekking ground.

One or two of the elms are ivy-covered, and there is one large oak that was once much favoured by pigeon and the corvine tribe. When its leaves become a swarm of caterpillars, families of jays arrive there, and, when I first "took over" the place, most of the magpies, crows, jackdaws and jays were shot from a rough hide I constructed in the dry ditch under this tree.

Three or four seasons ago, when I first got to know the place, I found it, and its near-surroundings, well populated with vermin birds. That season I killed four crows at the two nests on the hill-top; three pairs of jays at their nests; four pairs of magpies at theirs. Last season one crow nested there and one magpie, and suffered for their folly. This spring there are no nests of the corvine tribe, though I destroyed the nest of a magpie and one of its owners on my way up there.

True Bird Sanctuaries

Before the war, when I was one of those looking after several thousand acres of shooting, about the slopes of which had been planted a number of pheasant coverts, and on the lower portion of which were small, natural woods in wild country, we kept down the vermin to an absolute minimum, with the result that our coverts were filled with small birds almost untroubled by their natural enemies. To listen to the dawn and evening chorus was more than "a treat"; the air throbbed and vibrated with songs of many species.

I was reminded of those days when I climbed up to my hill-top retreat on an evening of last week, in order to search some overgrown pits for a suspected vixen and cubs. Having reached the top of the ridge and stopped for a few moments to glance out over the marshes spreading into the distance across the valley far below, I made towards my rough triangle via a line of high elms. Suddenly, a tawny owl flew hurriedly (why?) out of a single holly-tree in the hedge, seemed for an instant as though it were coming straight for me, then flashed up into an elm, where it sat near the trunk looking down at me. It may be thought that I have used the wrong verb when I write "flashed," but anyone who has seen a tawny in a hurry will not disagree with me, and its upward zoom through the branches of the elm was truly marvellous for a bird which one is apt to regard as a somewhat clumsy flier.

Was It a Sparrow-Hawk?

At the end of the elm-belt, another line of trees runs off at a right-angle, and I had almost reached the angle of the two belts, when the gun automatically came up as I saw a hawk glide swiftly along the far side of the trees. I could have sworn by its rapid glide (even though a good view of it was spoiled by the lower foliage) that the bird was a hen sparrow-hawk, and I remembered the little cock sparrow-hawk I had seen two evenings before at the foot of the hill. But I also knew that a pair of kestrels were nesting in my sanctuary, and I lowered the barrels of the gun. I am still in grave doubt, however, whether or not I let a hen sparrow-hawk get the better of me. As I entered my triangle of rough stuff, I waded waist-deep through briars and nettles to the hollow stump of a tree less than fifteen feet high and tapped hard upon it. I did not feel too happy when out zig-zagged the hen kestrel which I knew to be sitting on eggs there.

For about half-an-hour we searched for an earth among the dense bramble-cover, scrub and nettles of the pits, without luck. One place, under the roots of a tree overhanging great stone-slabs and sand-stone, had the footprints of a badger, but there was no place for earth, sett, or even a rabbit burrow. Scratched by briar and bramble, stung by nettles, flies and midges, we were glad to climb up the slippery side of the last pit into the fresh air and brilliant and warm light of a westerning sun.

For a full hour we sat on a gentle slope of grass facing the west, with a solitary small silver birch behind us, and bramble bushes on either side. And it was at this juncture that I recalled our game coverts of the past and the full and free song of birds deprived of their enemies. Here, I had weeded out the predators bent on nesting, and had periodically shot those flying over or about the place. And, though an old squawking crow might pass over high, and I had seen what I cannot help thinking was a sparrow-hawk, the small birds in this wild, unfrequented spot seemed utterly unafraid.

A Jumble of Melody

A cuckoo shouted itself hoarse; a pair of nightingales were jugging and trilling their rich song; chiffchaff and willow-warbler; chaffinch and whitethroat, and half-a-dozen or more species kept up a continual chittering, scolding, and chain of small song. But most melodious were the blackbirds, and it seemed strange to hear so many in full song. Recently I took a companion to this spot on an evening when the blackies were in full voice. "I never can tell the song of a blackbird from that of a thrush," he said. So I told him that nothing was easier: that you could put words to the song of the thrush, but not to that of the blackbird. As a background to this evening's chorus came the sleepy, monotonous crooning of newly-arrived turtle-doves, and the rasping chur of a pair of starlings feeding young at the nesting-hole in the top of a long-dead tree.

As we sat with half-closed eyes, yet alert, facing the warmth of a setting sun and thinking seriously about descending to the village for a drink, a nightingale started up in the bushes only a few feet away. She was beginning her throbbing notes when three pigeon appeared suddenly over the tree-tops to our right. Slowly I reached for the gun, slipped forward the safety-catch and fired. No nightingale ever stopped its song so dead! The poor birdie probably choked itself. A pigeon fell among the brambles and nettles, to be retrieved by an eight-year-old Don who shot down one side of a steep pit and up the other to the fall, returning the same hard way, diagonally, up almost perpendicular sides of slippery sand and grass.

Of the thousands of pigeon I have shot in a lifetime, none, I think, could have had a crop more fully crammed with wheat. There was enough in that extended crop to keep a chicken farm going for a month — or perhaps not quite that! But I wonder how many woodpigeon, feeding, say, twice a day, would it take to fly away with a sack of wheat. Perhaps some of our ballistic-calculators of feet-per-sec., length of lead, and speed of bird, would like to turn their attentions to this problem as a change!

I am well aware that rooks and jackdaws (particularly the latter) get to know when villagers feed their poultry at dawn and late afternoon, and will then descend into the runs and quickly dab a bit of meal or bread and fly off with it. But during the past two years it seems to me remarkable (locally) how some rooks have taken to turning up at this and that hen-run dead at feeding-time when the rest of their kind are out feeding in the fields. Any dropped eggs are quickly stolen.

A neighbour has lost several geese eggs and hen eggs in this way, and, having waited near the two pens at feeding time and having disposed of three magpies and several jackdaws, I started on rooks seen floating round at feeding time waiting, like the poultry itself, to be fed. The number I have shot is considerable, but I believe every one of my victims had formed the habit of raiding the runs for food and eggs.

SUNBURNT PASTURES

by Alan Savory

This is the first of a short series of articles by an author well known to readers of this journal.—Editor.

"I DON'T just get this shootin' racket," drawled the fair-haired, blue-eyed lady from Virginia as the B.O.A.C. Argonaut droned down the coast of Italy where the grey-green of the rocky headlands pushed white-rimmed fingers into the corrugated blue of the Mediterranean. "I'd like to see every man, woman and child moved out of Africa and have it left a continent fit for animals to live in. Gee! I guess I'm a conservationist!"

She and her husband and family were setting forth on a photographic safari into the Congo. Mrs. A., who was sitting on my other side by the window, being an early Kenya settler and wise in her generation, said nothing. She merely twitched a quizzical eyebrow. She and I had shared a table at Rome Airport and had lunched with two extremely pleasant Americans who were going on a shooting safari. They were now sitting a few seats further back in the plane. We hoped the rival factions would not meet!

Darkness laid sable wings over the world of clouds and high skies and leagues of seaways beneath us as our little community, enclosed in streamlined metal, dined and had drinks and tried to sleep twenty thousand feet high in the night sky, as the aeroplane throbbed its way towards the bright pin-points of light that lay in chains and chandeliers and long lines and circles, like remote candles of winking flame, far down in the deep, velvet blackness that was Cairo.

Cairo Airport is full of ancient smells mixed with the hot breath of the sand—the smells that have through untold centuries been part and parcel of a vast, unwashed land. They offered us lemonade and cakes at the airport. There were crickets chirping in the outer darkness. Thence to Khartoum, where the dark was even darker and the heat was even more oppressive, but the Sudanese waiters who brought our coffee strode about like soldiers. And then the long flight over the desert where the heat of the day, festering in the hours of darkness, reached upwards from the cooling sand.

Dawn and Dreams

Dawn came with the quick slow, quick slow, strokes of a giant paint-brush. One moment the world outside was black, but flushed with false dawn; then deep blue like spilt ink; then green and gold above a brown horizon; then pink and gold with a wisp of orange cloud. And then we were flying over a gigantic dust-bowl and it was broad daylight.

Mrs. A. was curled up like a little Persian cat beside me. She came awake as a shaft of sunlight lightened her face. "Have you been asleep?" she asked.

"Yes," I said, "but only for about an hour."

"Oh," said Mrs. A., "and did you dream?"

"Yes — of crocodiles, charging rhino — elephants — and girl friends. All mixed up together!"

"Really," said Mrs. A. "Do you know, I think you are going to enjoy your visit to Kenya."

After a while, far down in the brown murk of the land, there was a suspicion of a thin, bright line winding. Someone said it was the Blue Nile. Then there were miles and miles of mottled bush country. Then the light tops of huts here and there amongst patches of green; and then it was all obscured by clouds, and after a time we landed on the airstrip at Entebbi in the pouring rain. There were banana trees and the country was green. There were two house-martins flying about the airstrip and a Goliath heron, grey and tawny, flew slowly and remotely towards the vast and windy wastes of Lake Victoria.

A few hours later we touched down at Eastleigh Airport. We had arrived in Nairobi and the sun was shining. I saw my host and old school friend John waving. He was dressed in a bush jacket, cord trousers, and a green hat. "Your settler friend is certainly dressed for the part," said Mrs. A. "Now remember — don't mix your drinks and blame it all on the altitude." With that she went out of my life, and joined a crowd of people by the customs counter.

John and I had lunch at the airport and then drove in his shooting brake to the little shop of Babu Kahn who plies the trade of tailor in two tiny rooms at the top of a winding staircase. Babu Kahn was a little dried up Indian with a quick needle and nimble fingers. In spite of it being Sunday he had opened his shop on purpose to measure me for cord trousers and a bush jacket. We drove quickly round Nairobi which is a comparatively young town of white buildings and buff walls and wide roads divided by a strip of granite edged grass wherein were flower beds full of pink and orange and purple bougainvillaeas. There were clumps of poinsetta and the great pink bell flowers of begonia that hung like inverted candles from the deep green of foliage covered posts.

Progress and the Primitive

Nairobi spreads out from the New Stanley Hotel and is a rapidly growing city. It is when you look up into the intense powder blue sky and see far far up a vulture circling in slow motion and the kites and buzzards screaming over a dead cat on a vacant building lot that you begin to wonder how big or how small is this mankind that dares to build its houses and its shops and its roads on the utterly primitive face of Africa. There were negroes everywhere, standing on the street corners, dressed in the latest fashions, with the bizarre additions of bright pink shirts and yellow shoes. There seemed to be a lot of "class distinctions." Those dressed alike walked together and those with shoes had little to with their bare-footed neighbours.

"You would hardly think there was a pitched battle here on that bit of waste land," said John. "The Mau Mau were pretty bad here — a lot of it has gone underground, but it is still a bit tricky. We still take revolvers when we go fishing."

We left Nairobi on the long run to Mweiga, the sunlight and the heat beating back at me from the tarmac roads. There were many cars driven by Indians who seemed to pay little regard for road safety. On a number of corners there were the remains of crashed cars, put there, I suppose, as a warning. Some of them looked as if they had been through an electric press. The way led through sisal farm and police camps. There was plenty of barbed wire and army lorries, but mostly miles and miles of sisal and belts of camel coffee trees and eucalyptus. Here and there there was a long vista of thorn trees and the glimpse of forest and the pink sheen of Cape chestnut trees, silent and bearded with Spanish moss. Twenty miles beyond Nairobi there was a small herd of Thompsons gazelle feeding on a little green knoll that swelled like a mosquito bite on the brown sunburnt skin of the pasture.

A Dusty Climb

We came to the end of the tarmac and were soon throwing up clouds of dust from the red and corrugated dirt road that winds and climbs steadily upwards in slow snake-like contortions to the White Highlands ninety-odd miles from Nairobi. We stopped by the roadside for a drink. John's wife had sent a bottle of brandy and some soda water. The sun was sweltering down from directly overhead and the sky was bright. There were African monarch butterflies on the flowers beside the road, and brown veined whites and African clouded yellows, and painted ladies and a yellow butterfly that looked like a marbled white, only yellow. And there were grizzled skippers and blues and coppers. And there were pied shrikes like small magpies, and the insistent *saw-saw-saw* of cicadas and the chissiking rasp of countless grasshoppers.

Recognisable amongst the wayside plants were wild salvia whose tall spikes of tremendous blue dwarfed the African petunias and the yellow daisies and the countless others, dusty and hot beneath the fierce African sun. There was no wind and no sound save the cicadas and the grasshoppers. To the north the mountains rose veiled in sun haze. We had some more brandy and soda. It helped to keep the dust from choking us. Then on we went past plodding native cattle being driven back to the bomas for the night, past African villages of round thatched huts where tiny black children played and tumbled in the dust. Each village was surrounded by a deep ditch full of sharpened spikes of bamboo surmounted by a steep bank also bristling with bamboo spikes. The shadow of the Mau Mau lay heavy on the land.

We went by great areas of millet like dwarf

Fortifications outside a native village to keep out Mau Mau.

forests of bullrushes, and Indian corn. There were Kikuyu women carrying huge bundles of firewood on their heads; Kuni they call it in Swahili. There were men armed with spears, and all the black population seemed to have a panga in their hands. But they, like the negroes in Nairobi, looked fit and well. I saw no distressing sights of starved babies and undernourishment.

We came to Nyeri with its eucalyptus trees and dappled sunlit street; its dirty white Indian shops where the Asiatics hiss at you like a basket full of snakes, and they say "Yesss", to every request. If they have not what you want their uncle who has a shop next door has it, or just across the road. Or they will get it on Monday from Nairobi. "Yess — SSSir — Pleasse SSir." "Thank you, SSSSir — Yessss."

The Silent Forest

We passed the police station with its barbed wire guarded huts; down and around and up the hill by the priest's coffee shamba and the trout stream, now running red at full bank-level from the recent rains that should have stopped weeks before. Passed jacaranda trees whose blue flowers hung like lupins amidst the delicate fronds of green. A bee-eater flew across the road and a large grey hawk sailed majestically over the valley. There were many hawks and pied shrikes and two great Auger buzzards swung in slow circles, the sun lighting up their rounded wings and red tails.

Nyeri forest, silent, watchful and oppressive, reached away on either side of the road. There were game trails where rhino and elephant had walked in their migratory season through centuries of custom. Depths of forest seen through the scattered trees where no man dare go unarmed, and the euphorbia trees stood reaching to the sky, reaching with bare cactus arms like a nightmare tree in a dead world. There was a bush buck a little way in from the road. It had a fawn close by, because we heard it calling to it, and in a valley where the forest moved back to the far summit of the hill there were marabou storks cleaning up the last of a dead elephant that had lumbered out of the trees and died in the open, either horned in a fight or more likely hit by a fragment of bomb during operations against the Mau Mau in the Aberdare Mountains. Undulating country of forest and bush and sisal shambas gone wild.

We turned up a hill at right angles and climbed round an incline where there was a notice board that said, "Slowly! Slowly!" and underneath the Swahili translation, "Poli! Poli!" It was a bad corner in wet weather with a drop into the valley below. There were house birds dusting in the road — lovely little things like large bearded-tits without the moustaches. They flew up in clouds and vanished in the sisal. John hated them. He said he had a complex about them. "They are absolute little devils," he said, "we have to cover up all the fruit and vegetables or they would get the lot. Don't waste any pity on them. They are absolute little baskets."

Journey's End

Then up the drive to the dwelling place where John and Mrs. John live. A wide and rambling stone-built bungalow covered with flowering creepers and set in an exquisite garden whose terraced lawns sweep down to a clump of Cape chestnut trees, where lesser hornbills bugle from the top-most boughs and golden oriels shrill their butcher boy whistle. It is in a wonderful position with the far ranges of the Aberdares away to the westward; Mount Kenya's snowy peaks to the east, and northward beyond the valley of the Amboni river mile upon mile of veld and bush and hill and scattered stony outcrops and empty thorn country where eagles and harriers forever hunt. Right away it goes, a gigantic country, hard and cruel and as fascinating as a wicked woman, right away to the Abyssinian border.

Jambo Bwana

The two Marigoli house-boys, Benjamin and Herman, and Karimi, son of Karioki, the Kikuyu cook and the kitchen Toto, were waiting for the Bwana and "Bwana the visitor." They all smiled showing white teeth in black faces and said "Jambo Bwana!" They all seemed pleased to see me. I was shown into a bedroom where John proceeded to lecture Herman on the needs of the visitor from England, the "great lord from the Northland." Herman seemed to turn even blacker and said, "Ndia — ndia Bwana!" Then on the veranda I met my hostess, who was having a terrific ping-pong battle with young Micky Beytes, the son of Brigadier and Ruby Beytes who were the nearest neighbours.

After tea, as we sat watching the saffron coloured weaver birds and the doves come to the bird-bath on the lawn, and the light changing on the far slopes of the valley wherein rushed and tumbled the Amboni river, I met the smallest member of the household, a little grey lady who watched with sad and wistful eyes. This was Lindy and she was a Cairn terrier. Once Lindy had a great friend who was killed by a wild pig. His name was Skippy and he was a bull terrier. Now Lindy sat for hours watching the far slopes of the Aberdares and the bush. She was a sad little dog with a great heart.

Round about 6 o'clock, Mrs. John said, "What about a little gin and Dubonnet, or a pink gin — no — well, what about a whisky?" What had Mrs. A. said about mixing one's drinks? — and we were seven thousand feet up here. I had a large brandy and soda. After all, I had only left London Airport at 9.30 the morning of the day before.

(To be continued next week)

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GUN GOSSIP

by North Country

A GUN cabinet is always a pleasing bit of furniture in any home and there is much to be said in favour of it. One thing is that it offers the best means of displaying to advantage, to both shooters and non-shooters the guns and rifles of a house. So long as guns are kept in their cases they remain unseen and forgotten by all except the actual users or owners. And you know, I do think in view of all that goes into the making and manufacture of a quality gun it should be on show to all who come and go. Very many laymen are interested in guns in just this respect. It seems a pity if such beautiful weapons are only seen on shooting days. In a cabinet they can be deservedly admired and their fine lines and workmanship will be a joy forever.

Several Advantages

From the practical shooting standpoint there are also several definite advantages. First of all, for the man who lives on or close to his shoot it is a simple matter to take a gun from the cabinet (where it is quite safe) and go into the field. It is there ready for him waiting. A far more convenient way than having to get it out of a case, take out the parts and put them together. This too saves wear and tear. Secondly, there is the advantage that a gun in a cabinet is constantly under observation, whereas one in a case lies unseen and may be temporarily forgotten. I remember once opening a case and finding the gun red with rust! It is, however, a wise plan to place a cabinet (or gun cases) in a room where there is usually a fire. This is an insurance against the effects of moisture and damp and the precaution too saves the need of leaving weapons in an excessively oily or greasy state. For where you know there is no security from damp the only thing you can do is to apply liberal quantities of oil or grease.

At this time, in country houses, where there is no cabinet, guns may be kept in the kitchen or any room which is kept dry and aired by constant fires. I knew a kitchen where a rack had been fitted in the corner between the dresser and the window. Guns were kept there during the summer months—which may be a danger period. The disadvantage of this is that a weapon may get into irresponsible hands. I once heard of a case where the butler was found out shooting with his master's best gun! There is nothing like a cabinet (with cleaning accessories at hand) in one of the main rooms of the house.

Choke Bores

I have a letter from a Nottinghamshire reader who is thinking of buying a gun but who is not quite sure of the boring. He does not say very much, but from what he does tell I should say it is full choke. It might be as well for him to get this checked up by the nearest gunmaker. I am assuming, of course, that it is secondhand and not a new gun at the local firm of gunmakers. I do not think that a full choke is always the most suitable gun to buy. But the choke can always be reduced at a relatively small cost, should a more open form of boring be required. Talking of which, I can remember an old friend saying how unpopular choke boring was in its early days, among many game shooters. As now, so it was then—improved cylinder or very slight choke was the best bet.

Try To Forget

If you should wish to train yourself in the use of a heavy choke, I would say it would probably help if you could largely forget when shooting that you had a choke. I can well remember the first occasion upon which I went into the field with a heavily-choked gun. Fondly imagining that I commanded a great extention of range, I began to take shots at all kinds of absurd lengths. Well, it just didn't work. My first day was certainly not a success and my bag was below average. I came home humbled and disappointed.

There is this further consideration. If you know you are shooting with a full choke you may be worried at the thought of spoiling your game. If you are, you will be inclined to check your action. Which will be fatal—for you will never connect in that fashion. If you will forget and shoot in normal fashion, you will be far more likely to shoot up to your standard, gradually but slightly extending your range. That, I think, is the best way to go about it.

The adult beginner will find a moor easier to keeper than low ground.

Round the Game Preserves

by David Imrie

SOME time ago I mentioned that experienced keepers must be less numerous in this country than they were in pre-war times, and I supported this estimate by quoting two estates known to me which had each been without a couple of keepers for months last year, although vigorous efforts had been made to secure suitable men. Last week I had further proof of this scarcity. A young man, who has no experience of game preservation, told me that he had got an underkeeper's job on a very good grouse moor. Despite his lack of experience, I am quite convinced that he will pick up the necessary knowledge in a short time. He is interested in shooting, has been a member of a wildfowling club for several years, and was brought up in the country.

The point is, however, that a fellow of his age could not have easily got a keepering job, say, 20 years ago. In those days Velveteens was either of keepering stock, or had begun early as an assistant to a headkeeper. But even a non-pedigree assistant was reckoned by some die-hards to be an inferior type of game preserver. He lacked background in their estimation. Nowadays this attitude is apparently fading away, probably because circumstances make it no longer tenable.

At the same time I am prepared to agree partly with the die-hards. I do not believe that anyone of any age can be a successful keeper anywhere. Methods of game preservation differ on high and low ground ; and in each of those places there may be local differences. Therefore, the beginner of mature years must have something in his favour if he would carry on even as an underkeeper. As far as my friend, the potential grouse moor keeper, is concerned, this is assured. He and the other underman will work fairly often with the head, who can take them about in a car.

Trapping Routine

There will be times, of course, when my friend will have to examine vermin traps alone; but on grouse moors many of these devices are set permanently, which means that much of this work is routine. The man simply goes off in the morning, perhaps with a supply of fresh baits in his bag, and walks the trap line until late afternoon. If he does happen to see a stoat which he cannot shoot, or signs of stoats, some distance from a trap, he can set up another figure-4 straightaway ; for the Samson or figure-4 is the main vermin trap in that district, and it has the advantage that the keeper need carry only a few spare sticks in his bag, instead of heavy gins.

Most other kinds of vermin, except perhaps foxes, are only occasional visitors to that moor, as they are on many moors. I believe that magpies have been seen there lately in unusual numbers ; but carrion crows, jays, gulls, sparrow-hawks, poaching cats, badgers, hedgehogs, rooks, jackdaws, and roaming dogs, which plague the low ground, are not a serious menace. Buzzards, peregrines, merlins, and short-eared owls are more often seen on the open moor, but keepers, or anyone else, would be well advised to leave those predators alone ; so methods of destroying them are merely of academic interest nowadays.

Grouse Driving Difficulties

One of the main difficulties with which my friend will have to contend at first is grouse driving. It is true that butts are usually sited to cut the common lines of flight ; but adverse winds, or stupid drivers, may turn the birds in other directions, if suitable action is not taken to counteract their influence. This requires fine judgment. Grouse which are forced too hard against a cross wind will fly back over the drivers, and drivers who are checked too often for forging ahead or lagging behind generally finish up by doing nothing right.

There are also drives which are taken in on a pivot. They can be tricky, if the drivers at each end of the line are frequently invisible to each other ; and a mess can ensue, unless the keeper in charge notes the position of his men as often as possible as the drive proceeds, although he cannot normally leave his own place to do so.

I can think of one pivoted drive on the Swaledale moors which has to be conducted carefully in calm weather, and is extremely difficult when cross winds are blowing. The pivot is on the left ; and if the wind is coming from the right, half-a-dozen flankers in close formation between the pivot and the butts can hardly prevent the birds from flying out unscathed there. In circumstances of this sort it helps if the right-hand end of the driving line is held back a little. This manoeuvre does persuade the grouse to fly into the wind as they rise ; and although they eventually swing with the wind, this initial advantage may be further exploited by vigorous flanking, and some birds at least will go over the butts. It is a delicate operation indeed, and one which could not be tackled alone by an inexperienced keeper. He might manage, however, if he had reliable local men in the line who had helped with that drive in all sorts of conditions.

Signal Shots

It is also a complication if two teams of drivers are bringing in sections of the moor alternately. Obviously one lot should not begin until the keeper in charge gets the signal from the head to tell him that the previous drive is finished, and that all is ready for the next. On days when visibility is poor on high ground, or when winds muffle distant sounds, an inexperienced keeper might wait for an hour or more beyond the starting time, particuarly if he were not sure of the exact place from which the signal should come. I have seen old hands make mistakes which delayed drives considerably (generally in light mist) but a beginner would probably make them more often, unless he remained keenly alert for the flag-wagging, shot, or whistle. Incidentally, it was once my duty to fire a couple of signal shots to start drives on the upper Swaledale moors, and this system was adopted after two drives had failed to start with the customary flag-wagging from an outside flanker. This trouble would not occur, of course, with one team of drivers, because the pick-up and changing of positions at the butts would always be over before they walked a mile or so, and got lined out again for the next drive.

But, at the risk of offending grouse enthusiasts, I should expect a beginner of mature years to do better at first on a moor where he could get frequent supervision from a headkeeper than on low ground, particularly on estates where pheasants, partridges, and wild duck are reared by hand, or where the Euston system is practised. More technical knowledge is actually needed by a low ground underkeeper, because he deals with a variety of game; and even that drudgery of the low ground, which is called rabbit destruction, demands a degree of skill not commonly found among laymen. In fact, efficient trapping and snaring are mainly the result of long experience.

It is also true that the low ground underkeeper needs to be more alert to defeat poachers than his counterpart on the moors. Always there are people with guns, and people in search of rabbits by other means, on arable land ; and from the keeper's point of view they are potential poachers, although many of them may never justify his suspicions.

In addition to those suspects, there are the real, persistent poachers who are more unobtrusive but who are nevertheless more of a menace to the keeper's professional existence. For this reason he must always be on the lookout for evidence of their depredations, so that he may stop them before too much harm is done to the game stock. And he must avoid many social contacts just in case his enemies should take advantage of his absence from the fields and coverts to do some plundering. Very few moorland keepers live in an atmosphere of this sort. With minor exceptions, no shooters nor rabbiters have any authority on high ground ; and semi-professional poachers cannot do much among grouse at night.

I should say also that the low ground underkeeper has to be more of a diplomat than the moorland man. Both try their utmost to produce game ; but Velveteens of the arable fields produces it where it may cause trouble for himself. So he has to cultivate a technique for dealing with infuriated or peevish farmers. This is not a job for beginners !

The Young Shot

Death in the Fold

by Petrel

THE time-worn advice never to count your chickens until they are hatched, applies in fact and implication long after the actual hatching date. And, of course, it applies not only to chickens. The game preserver needs no reminder of this, and to call a keeper canny because he hedges when asked for an accurate forecast of the season's prospects, is not being strictly fair. He is merely being sensible, for he knows from experience that while he is taking every precaution to ensure successful shooting, there is always the chance of something upsetting his plans.

It is never safe to count a bird until it is in the bag. And while it is galling for the larger-scale game preserver to lose birds for any reason, it is that much worse for the small-time, back-yard rearer, to whom even one or two casualties will represent a much larger percentage of his total stock.

Modern methods of rearing game and wildfowl have proved a boon to all, but especially to the latter. He may not be able to depend upon the wild birds on his shoot, for want of time to look after them as he should, but it is quite true, as they are so fond of saying at Fordingbridge, that he can rear and tend supplementary stock with a minimum of trouble and then don his bowler hat and leave for a day at the office in the secure knowledge that his birds will remain safe and sound until his return.

Two small events of the past week have emphasised the advantages of hand rearing over leaving it to nature, and rudely reminded me, even so, of underestimating the hazards.

The reminder came first. For just over a fortnight I had been complimenting the broody and myself on the successful headway being made by the first brood of a dozen ducklings to hatch off. Identical in size and growing apace on a diet of poultry crumbs, all were doing well until one morning, when on counting them as they issued from the ark into the run, I noticed one was missing. Admitted, even such a small number is not easy to count at a glance as the birds dart about, and I was in such a hurry that morning that I would have had no time to don my bowler if I wore one, so I consoled myself with the thought that again my addition was at fault. However, a more leisurely evening check confirmed that now there were only eleven, and no sign of the twelfth which had apparently vanished into thin air.

A rat, was my immediate thought. But how did it get in, for I had been careful to earth up the sides of the ark so that there was no space between the side-boards and the ground. And surely a rat would have savaged more than one duckling ; or left some sign of blood and feathers. A closer inspection disclosed that there was a slight space left open between a turf and the wooden framework in the rear of the ark, but it was barely three quarters of an inch wide and there was no sign of flattened grass or of a run having been made. This gap I blocked, and wondered, but on the next night the mystery was solved.

Returning from friends shortly before midnight I turned the car down towards our stable yard and for a moment the headlights illuminated the ark and pen. Crouched between one of its wheels and the protruding laying box was a white cat, and quite plainly it was trying to reach beneath the timbers through a hole which I later discovered it had scratched in my newly built rampart.

At my approach it bolted, but I was now stung into action. Out came the bloater paste and down went the trap, but for two days I never saw the culprit. Then, quite by chance I put paid to further depredations.

As I was sawing a fallen beech branch the hound suddenly pointed a bramble bush. Hied on, he plunged into the cover and leaped inside the hollow bole of a long felled oak, to emerge a moment later with one of three hidden kittens. A short wait, a quick shot and eleven duck now thrive for the price of one. I blame myself, of course. As I said recently ; unless a cat is well-fed and kept indoors at night, it never pays to give it the benefit of the doubt.

A Poor Return

For the other tragedy I blamed the duck.

Sitting within a fox-proof enclosure, inside a circle of rat and other ground vermin defences, she should, I feel, have made a better job of her clutch of 14 eggs. Four hatched, and after a single day on the water one duckling, with a twisted leg heeled over and died on the mud. Two eggs proved infertile ; the rest were abandoned with their occupants well-formed and dead in the shell. Will someone suggest why ? I know that duck have a high fertility ratio, or whatever the scientists call it, but I now wonder whether some of those depleted broods which one sees about are due entirely to vermin or whether the incompetence of the duck is not to blame.

Off to a better start than they would have had in the wild.

So far, and I hate to say so in case I invite trouble, rats which are the duck rearer's bane, have caused little concern. The absence of their tracks in the mud confirms that the feed hopper at the water's edge has not attracted them, and in part this may be due to the sugar sweetened Warfarin which lies temptingly dry in drain pipes along the two-inch mesh fence of the compound. Wherever rats are in evidence, the bait for a trap or poison must be more attractive than the food which attracts them ; hence the sugared pill.

The only rat caught in the last three weeks was one which trod on the gin set beneath the poultry house, and I doubt whether that would have fallen victim if it had not been driven in search of warmth and dry food by three days of frost followed by two days' rain.

More Trouble

Alas, there have been casualties, too, in the hen run, though not from vermin. More likely over-feeding with modern concentrated foods has been to blame, for three most productive Rhode x Sussex pullets suffered prolapses within four days. One of the remaining quartet showed first signs of following suit, but modified feeding seems to have stopped the rot. I do not know enough about poultry to determine the exact cause of these fatalities, but my poultry-farming neighbours claim that either the feeding or the strain of fowl is to blame, and that these birds just happened to be a bad lot.

In these days of intensive and concentrated farming and feeding there are still a great many countrymen who refuse to have anything to do with new-fangled methods and food supplements etc., even though the evidence before them is that these modern substances are efficient and harmless to boot. One is accustomed to hearing new products condemned, rightly or wrongly, because of their apparent ill effects, but it is not often that something is criticised for being too good.

An illustration of the latter was provided by a farmer who was giving a certain food supplement to his hunter with successful results, and who amazed the firm's traveller one day by running down the product in terms loud enough for all to hear. On being asked why he should do this when he was still ordering the product in bulk, the farmer gave a simple explanation.

"Take the case of my horse," he said, "up to recently it has run in several point-to-points and always it has been second. Then I start giving it your X and it runs first all the time. If everyone gets to hear how good this stuff is, they'll all be using it, and then my horse will be back where it was, always in second place."

A compliment, of course, but a very back-handed one.

* * *

At last week's meeting of my local hunt's Farmers' and Supporters' Club, it was suggested that a junior membership be inaugurated in view of the many young followers interested.

As an example of the keenness displayed by the younger generation, the case was quoted of an eight-year-old boy who attended, almost without fail, every Saturday and Wednesday meet.

When asked how he managed to stay away from school on term-time Wednesdays he replied succinctly : "I've got a doctor's certificate."

Irish Waders

by Sea-Pie

IF anyone walking down the bird-gallery in the University Museum of Natural History at Cambridge happens to notice a turnstone by itself in a glass shade, that person might be interested to know that the bird—although such a common one—was one of the most prized by the man who made the collection. It is the first wading bird the writer ever shot. It was obtained on the shores of Lough Swilly in the north of Ireland, and as dear old Henry Montgomery—father of our Field Marshal Lord Monty—used to say when writing home from Tasmania, "A lot of Liffey water has flowed by the North Wall since I was in Dublin."

Not many specimens shot with the ancient "family" hammer-gun in after years gave quite so good a thrill as this little wanderer from some northern clime. It flew past our boat as we were drawing near the stone jetty below old MacBride's cottage near Rathmullan. My brother and I had been fishing, but had brought father's musket with us to try and shoot a cormorant. I raised the hammers, lifted the weapon, and pressed the trigger, when somewhat to my surprise the victim dropped stone-dead on a heap of slippery brown seaweed. With what glee was it retrieved! How tenderly was the little body stroked down and every feather laid in place! The plummage was hardly ruffled, so that one almost feared the Irish humour, for which MacBride was noted, might lead him to suggest the trophy had died of fright.

Turnstones are not so common in Ireland as on our East Anglian mud-flats, but it is generally supposed that a pair or two occasionally breed in the wild west of Paddy-land. In those days when I first began to visit Ireland with rod and gun for my holidays, two Irish naturalists, Richard Ussher and Robert Warren, had already issued their book "Birds of Ireland." Quite recently (1954) a new volume with the same title by a small group of Irish ornithologists has brought the subject fairly up to date. Yet so rapidly does information on the distribution of birds accumulate, owing to the activities of swarms of bird-watchers, that even this latter work is already a trifle "dated."

Woodcock on the Wane

Shooting men often enquire if woodcock, snipe, curlew, and golden plover, are as abundant as they used to be in the Emerald Isle. The late Sir R. Payne-Gallwey was able to record in the 1880's that "from three to four hundred 'cock is a good yearly average on a favoured estate in Ireland; but in exceptionally good seasons that number may be nearly doubled." Twenty years or so later Ussher reported that "within living memory woodcock are thought to have diminished in winter in the counties of Cork, Kilkenney, and Donegal."

Although woodcock breed in every Irish county at the present time, there seems little doubt that there is a distinct falling off year by year both in the stock of home-bred birds, and in the numbers which arrive from abroad. This is largely due to the breaking up of many of the well-keepered estates, though some of the finest woodcock shooting in the world may still be had in parts of Ireland, particularly in the plantations of young conifers planted and managed by some Government Departments.

What birds-nesting boy ever forgets finding his first curlew's nest, with those great green pear-shaped eggs, and the old birds wheeling and wailing overhead! My friend, Mr. G. R. Humphreys of Dublin, who collaborated in the latest "Birds of Ireland," tells me the curlew has increased in almost all districts as a breeding species. This is the same in Great Britain, particularly in the north of England and lowlands of Scotland. The hills of Donegal, where I first hunted for grouse and curlew, are fairly depleted of the former, but curlew are now nesting not only in the ranges of Derryveagh and Glendowan, but on the neighbouring cultivated ground.

The golden plover is decreasing as a breeding bird in Ireland. It is doubtful if they nest today in Donegal where by father used to find them on Errigal and Muckish. It is fashionable today to call the birds "southern" golden plovers. But in winter when vast flocks arrive from abroad and assemble in favoured localities (where capital sport may often be obtained) the plumages of the "southern" and

Golden plover and curlew on the hills.

"northern" forms are so much alike it is impossible to distinguish the two races in the field.

Snipe hold their own and breed in every county in Ireland, and on some of the marine islands. A great immigration takes place in autumn and winter, birds arriving particularly abundantly in the Ulster province from Iceland, Faroes, and Scandinavia. Irish snipe-shooting, of course, is famous all the world over, but it is not carried on by professional snipe-shooters as was formerly the case. Much of the best snipe ground has been drained and the price of cartridges is now prohibitive. Jack snipe are much more local and less common in Ireland than full snipe, and they rarely occur in coastal areas.

The so-called Faroe snipe, hailing from Iceland and the far north, is possibly only a colour-variety of doubtful specific value. The melanistic form of the common species known as Sabine's snipe occurs with such persistence that it must be regarded as a regular "phase." More than fifty have been recorded from Ireland and no doubt it is often overlooked.

Chicken-like Whimbrel

Whimbrel do not breed in Ireland, but a pronounced spring migration passes up the western sea-board in the middle of May. I repeatedly noticed, when living in Kerry many years ago, that when these flights happened to alight on the sea-shore, the birds were ridiculously tame and ran in front of one exactly like a flock of chickens.

Lapwings are common all the year round, and it is known that many which have been bred in Scotland come to Ireland. When egg-collecting by amateurs was more prevalent than it is today, parts of the Emerald Isle were reputed to produce particularly fine and richly marked specimens. The late parson Jourdain, who probably knew more about birds' eggs than anyone else before or since his time, used to have consignments sent over from the east coast slobs in order to pick out rare varieties.

Sandpiper Status

Irish sandpipers are much less numerous than in Britain, the green sandpiper being an uncommon visitor, and the wood-sandpiper only a rare vagrant. But the elegant common sandpiper, the fisherman's companion, is as abundant and as much at home on the loughs and rivers of the Sister isle, as beside the waters of the north of England and bonnie Scotland.

Perhaps the most remarkable change in the status in any Irish wading bird is that of the black-tailed godwit, which was regarded as a rarity in my young shooting days. It now occurs annually and in increasing numbers in many localities, Cork harbour and the Shannon estuary being noted resorts.

Every book dealing with the local fauna of a particular district requires bringing up to date every five years or so. If this could be done in the shape of a supplement to the "Birds of Ireland" or the "Birds" of each particular county in England, this I feel sure would be a valuable innovation for modern naturalists to adopt, instead of repeating all the old records when after many years a new compilation becomes absolutely necessary.

In the Kitchen

by Penelope Turing

PERSONALLY, I think that you cannot do better than boil or steam fresh salmon, and fry small trout. "Boil" is not really the word, for the salmon should be poached in salted water which is never allowed actually to boil; time, 10 minutes to the pound, and 10 minutes over. Steaming needs twice as long. Small trout can be rolled in coarse oatmeal or egg-and-breadcrumbs before frying, and are delicious either way. There are, however, times when one has left-overs to deal with, and the following recipes may be useful.

Salmon and potato flan. Fill a flan tin or round fireproof dish with a layer of well mashed and creamed potato. Brush this over with beaten egg and brown under the grill. Make a thick white sauce with 1 pint of milk, 2oz. flour and 2oz. margarine, and add to this the flaked, cooked salmon, seasoning, and a few cooked green peas. Serve hot.

Salmon mousse. This is a more elaborate recipe, but is a delicious dish for a hot summer evening, and either salmon or trout can be used. Break up ½lb. of cold, cooked salmon, add salt, pepper and cayenne, and rub it through a sieve. Put this into a basin and mix it with 3 tablespoonfuls liquid aspic jelly, 4 tablespoons thick white sauce flavoured with vegetables, herbs and spices, 1 tablespoon tomato purée, and 4 tablespoons whipped cream or unsweetened tinned milk. Pour into a glass dish, decorate with sliced cucumber, tomato, or chopped olives, and allow to set. It should be chilled in the refrigerator before serving.

Salmon pancakes. Make some thin pancakes with unsweatened batter, and put into each a spoonful of flaked, cooked salmon flavoured with pepper, salt and lemon juice. Roll up and put them into a fireproof dish. Pour a little melted butter over each and brown in the oven.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters and photographs are invited for this page. They should be as brief as possible, and the names and addresses of senders must be given, though these need not necessarily be published. Correspondence should be addressed to The Editor, The Shooting Times & Country Magazine, 29 Old Bond Street, London, W.1. 'Phone: HYDe Park 2556/2557.

GUN OVERBOARD

Sir,—I would like to suggest that Mr. D. O'Connor tries the following method for recovering his sunken gun.

Let him obtain two old magneto magnets from any car breakers and tie them to a stick about two feet apart. If these are lowered on a rope to where the gun is thought to be and a lifting and lowering search is made of the area, the chances are that the magnets will eventually make contact with the barrels and stick.

In this manner I have recovered guns and fishing reels that have gone overboard.

GEORGE TOOGOOD,
West Croydon, Surrey.

A SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGN

Sir,—I have had yet another successful campaign against magpies and carrion crows. This year I succeeded in collecting one hundred and thirty-one eggs.

My total "score" for three years up to May 1957 is five hundred and sixteen.

FOXY,
Newark, Notts.

[But would not your campaign be even more successful if you shot the egg-producers as well!—Ed.]

PIGEON SHOOTING WITH A .22

Sir,—We had very few pigeon up this way last winter, and there were still very few about when they started to put the corn in. But the last few weeks, we have been seeing a nice lot about. The prices you can get for them vary, a friend receiving only 6d. apiece for 40 woodpigeon, while I have been lucky, getting 1s. apiece.

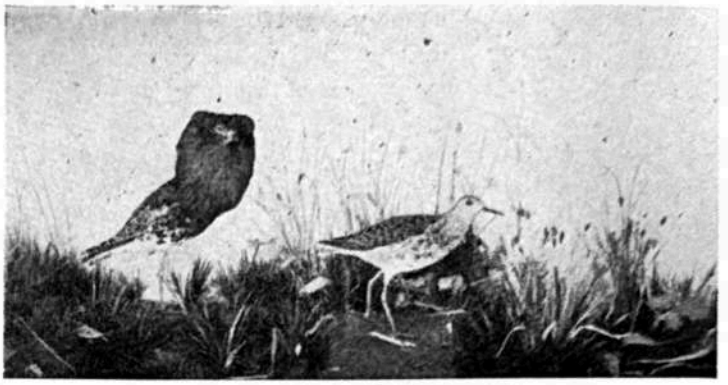
I have been killing a good few of the birds with my .22 rifle as they come in for a drink to a small pond on the farm, and sitting in a hide near a tree, on the field where they were feeding. My total bag of pigeon to the .22 to date is 139. It is cheaper shooting than with a 12-bore!

A.L.,
Hull.

ENTICEMENT TO NEST

Sir,—Referring to "Tower-Bird's" article entitled as above, apropos the recent attempt to restore the status of the ruff in East Anglia referred to in the issue for May 10, half-a-dozen wing-clipped reeves (females) from the London Zoo were turned down in Cley marsh in the latter part of April. So far as is known, the experiment has not been successful. A number of wild ruffs in good plumage arrived, as they often do with an east wind in the first week of May. But they brought their own gay little ladies with them, and so far as can be ascertained completely ignored the "stales," as old-time fowlers a hundred years ago used to term decoy-reeves put down to attract ruffs.

Experiments of this kind are regarded with some disfavour by many naturalists. A definite question arises as the desirability of aiding in this way the restoration of any species.



This pair of ruffs, now in Ipswich Museum, were shot on Thorpe Mere, Suffolk, before it was drained. The cock bird is in perfect plumage. (See letter, "Enticement to Nest.")

I, myself, incline to the view that it is a mistake to turn down pinioned birds on a wild nature reserve. It introduces an air of artificiality into the scene. The perfectly natural return of avocets and bitterns to East Anglia demonstrated that our lost fen-birds, can and do come back of their own initiative under careful protection. If the avocet colonies in Suffolk had been established by luring wildings into the area with the aid of wing-clipped stales, I doubt if the general interest which greeted the birds would have been quite as enthusiastic as it was.

The ruffs which arrived at Cley this spring were a glamorous sight because they were perfectly wild visitors from Holland. At the same time a good number turned up at the Midripps at Dungeness. It is thought that the Cley birds took their departure owing to the dryness of the weather. We know that the success or failure of the avocet colonies depends largely on maintaining the water-level at a certain number of inches. If this could be managed at Cley I think the wild ruffs and reeves would stay and breed.

Of course, many people would be quite content to see a colony of rare waders established by means of wing-clipped black-tailed godwits, stilts, etc. But that would convert Cley marsh into a kind of half-wild zoo.

If a sedentary, non-migratory species, completely dies out as the capercaillie is said to have done in the 18th century in Scotland, then there can be no objection to re-introducing it.

Consider the case of the British kites which, early in the present century, were reduced to only a pair or two in the wilds of Wales. A well-known North of England naturalist, went to much trouble and expense to bring kites' eggs from Spain to put into Welsh buzzards' nests. The detailed results of the experiment have never been made public, but there are still kites in Wales which would hardly be the case today, but for human intervention. Thus the present stock of our kites are almost certainly not of pure British origin.

The fishing eagle or osprey is a fine species which appears to be trying to re-establish itself in the Scottish highlands. Unlike the kite, it is a migratory bird, and granted adequate protection will almost certainly stage a "come-back." But I, for one, should regret to behold a pinioned osprey perched on the ruins of Loch-an-Eilean Castle, even if it attracted a mate and the pair nested there.

Admitting the problem is difficult, perhaps the fairest way of reconciling the different schools of thought is to emphasise the distinction between restoring a sedentary species which has already died out or is on the point of extinction, and replenishing the wild stock of fen-birds or migratory species which constantly (like the ruffs) revisit their old haunts, and may at any time settle down there again.

SEA-PIE,
Norfolk.

SHOT COLUMN QUERY

Sir,—Mr. James must shake the confidence of readers in his theories by founding them on a cardinal error. Sixty mile an hour is not equivalent to 66 feet per second, but less than 60ft., 58⅘rd. ft to be exact.

HENRY FLETCHER,
Boxmoor,
Herts.

THE LANCASTER "OVAL BORE"

Sir,—No doubt quite unwittingly the fourth paragraph of the letter from Dr. S. Ruttle, published in your issue for May 10, is somewhat misleading.

Charles Lancaster's "oval bore" was in use for probably 80 years, so it could hardly be described as an experiment. It was, moreover, a method of rifling, and as it was not used in shotguns it can have no influence at all upon the stringing of shot which is the subject of the correspondence.

In order to try and avoid confusion with oval bore rifles, we have at all times referred to the gun also mentioned as having an elliptical barrel. The building of this gun may well have been connected with the stringing of shot, but as the illustrated article upon this particular weapon which you published did not produce any information at all, and the gun itself is apparently unique, the objective in building was apparently not achieved.

W. R. H. ROBSON,
Managing Director, Stephen Grant and Joseph Lang Ltd., St. James's, S.W.1.

ROOKS AND ROOK RIFLES

Sir,—I should like to comment on Mr. James' fascinating article "Rooks and Rook Rifles."

Mr. James has always contended that the old-fashioned rook rifle had more stopping power than the modern .22. So it may have done in theory.

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But in the days when rook pie was a popular dish I believe that solids were always recommended for rooks and generally used for rooks. Stopping power is always difficult to define precisely. The Americans say it is governed by "the amount of tissue destroyed or displaced (by the bullet)." On this basis, the destruction of tissue by the .22 Long Rifle High Velocity hollow point is really something, if it strikes a bone (as it usually does).

Even on a purely "flesh hit," the expansion is pretty good, though not always enough to kill a young rook outright. Mr. James has probably had more experience of rook shooting than anyone we know, and that is just the trouble (as they said to the private detective in Agatha Christie's story: "The trouble with you, Barnaby, is that you know too much!"). I think it is most ill-advised of Mr. James to recommend beginners to use .22 solids on rooks when the hollow point costs no more (or does it?) and has at least three times as much stopping power when it expands properly (as it usually does). Even worse is "Petrel's" advice to beginners to make full use of the .22 air rifle on rooks.

Though far from a beginner, I should never again use a .22 air rifle on rooks unless (a) the rifle weighed at least 8lb. (preferably with a 'scope sight); (b) I was shooting from a third floor window at a vertical angle of less than 35°; (c) shooting them in the head at 20 yards or under. As a matter of fact, I find it requires the most advanced skill to kill even a jackdaw with a .22 air rifle, which is the ideal rifle for rats and young starlings.

Mr. James does not appear to know that other things being equal, the expansion of a bullet is a function of its velocity. It is this which gives the .22 high speed hollow point such a tremendous "cutting edge" in proportion to its size and weight.

The best way to test (and compare) expansion (or stopping power) is to fire the bullets end-ways into an ordinary bar of soap. Then study the effect. I have not yet tested .22 high speed as against .22 low speed in this way, but in Africa we exhaustively tested all .22 rimfire high speed ammo.—short, long, long rifle; British, German and American. We found in those days (1938) that the best expansion (and therefore the best stopping power) was achieved by the American "Western Super X" which had, I believe, a slightly higher velocity than any other make (the cases were nickel and the bullets cupro-coated).

Even in my day the ordinary low speed .22 long rifle hollow point was recognised as being greatly inferior to the .295 (or .300) in its stopping power on conies though it was probably far more accurate. In the black powder days, I believe the best and most accurate rifle of all was a .32 calibre "Express" which fired a 160 grs. bullet at 1,600ft. per second for roe deer and park deer (not to mention deer and antelopes of similar size in India and Africa), but whose large capacity cartridge case could be cheaply and easily reloaded (with black powder Schultze or Amberite) to shoot an 80 or 90 grs. bullet accurately up to 150 yards (M.V. 1,500ft. per second) for rooks, rabbits, geese or bustards (abroad), etc.

I have never shot any miniature rifle but the .22 rimfire. Mr. James says "The heavier .300 bullet is usually brought to rest on striking a rabbit." When I read this I rubbed my eyes. Frankly, I find this statement almost unbelievable. Why? Because a rabbit weighs well under 5lb. and the bullet weighs 80 grs. Well, at point blank range I have put a .22 long rifle high speed hollow point of only 40 grs. through both shoulders of a duiker — an antelope which weighs 35lb. (!); and the bullet expanded to .35 in diameter! It will also go clean through the skull of any crocodile of less than 3ft. 6in. from snout to tail tip!

I think I can say that, next to Mr. Peter Fleming, I have shot more different varieties of game and varmints with a .22 rim-fire in more out of the way places than any man alive.

But to return to the "vintage rifles." It is really tragic to think of these beautiful hand-made museum pieces being thrown on the scrap heap (what sacrilege!). Mr. James says that many of them can be converted into beautiful little .410 shotguns far more attractive than the modern factory-made .410 and probably costing less. True enough. But I have never found much use for a .410. The ammo. is very expensive in proportion to its power (though crimped metal cases are a great advantage) and I entirely agree with "North Country" that the 28-bore is greatly superior for serious work in the orchard or stack-yard, etc.

But this does not exhaust the possibilities at all. Messrs. Parker Hale of Birmingham will do a magnificent job of converting these rifles (by "Parkerifling") to modern .22 calibre. This, of course, adds some extra thickness to the walls of the barrel and it is my belief that a "Parkerifled" barrel is, if anything, superior in accuracy to a barrel forged in one piece. To add even more weight and bring out the modern .22, a 'scope could be fitted.

For those unable to afford such refinements, the barrel could be bored out smooth to .35 (or 9mm.) calibre to take the very useful No. 3 garden gun shot cartridge which is quite splendid for rats, starlings and even grey squirrels in one's garden or allotment, etc.

Finally, it should be remembered that many a good but unwanted old rifle selling for the merest pittance is already bored in .22 calibre. If you fancy it, buy it and have it bored smooth (by the village blacksmith if necessary!) to take either the British metallic .22 short shot cartridge or the Continental paper long ("double charge") shot cartridges which are deadly against rats, sparrows, and even starlings. This is the perfect solution for anyone who, having nowhere to use a .22 rifle, cannot obtain a Fire-arms Certificate. You do not even require a gun licence to use a .22 shot-gun in your garden or back-yard.

E. MUSPRATT,
Tunbridge Wells, Kent.

RESULT OF A COMPETITION

Sir,—I shall be pleased if, through the columns of *The Shooting Times*, you will allow me to inform the members of the North Lincs Wildfowlers' Club that, in connection with the recent competition, the competitor No. 230 has been judged to be the winner of the double-barrelled shotgun.

Mr. R. Taylor, hon. secretary, should be contacted to arrange delivery of the gun.

JAMES W. JOHNSON (Chairman),
Cleethorpes, Lincs.

LABRADORS

Sir,—In a recent issue of your journal there appeared a photograph with the caption "A fine day in the park, and a good show of pheasants anticipated . . ."

Had it not been for the caption and that a gun is visible I would have taken the photograph to be that of a greyhound waiting to enter for the Waterloo Cup.

What are you doing in England to this lovely breed of gundogs?

D. C. LOCKWOOD,
Vivorata, Argentine.

[Using them, sir, and to very good effect, both in the shooting field and on marsh and foreshore. We know there is a saying that "the camera cannot lie," but how often can you judge the looks of a dog by its snapshot?—Ed.]

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Fisherman's Diary

by Coridon

FROM this week onwards the summer holiday season is really upon us. Many people prefer early or late season holidays and are in a position to take what they want. Others, through lack of seniority in firm or department, have to choose from those days not earmarked by their seniors. Still more, in the industrial world, have a fixed fortnight when the works shut down completely and all save a watchman or two, from director to last joined apprentice, find themselves freed from work.

Staggered holidays are suggested and advised, but until school holidays are staggered there will always be an overwhelming August influx to the holiday resorts of parents with children of school age, so an increasing number of people not so circumscribed prefer to avoid the rush.

At whatever time of the year a seaside holiday is taken the sea is there, calm and brassy or cold and tempestuous according to the weather, but always and everywhere supporting some form of fish life.

Whether the holiday maker be a serious angler, a dilettante, or no fisherman at all, he can always have fun of a sort with rod or handline. Much depends on the coast, and in June it may often be necessary to go out in a boat to deeper water than the beach affords to contact sporting fish, but wherever the beach is steep-to or there are outcrops of rocks, there can fish be caught from the land.

From Suffolk southwards round to Anglesey the bass are in. From a few chosen promontories in the south-west mackerel can already be taken from the shore. Wrasse and congers are always possibilities, and off the Kent, Sussex and Hampshire coasts black bream will arrive at any moment for their brief season. A rod (owned or hired) or a handline can fill many hours with pleasure if not always with conspicuous success.

Art and the Angler

From my neglible knowledge of famous paintings I can name half-a-dozen in which an angler is figured at the waterside and any serious student of art could probably multiply that number by three or four or more. In none of the paintings I have in mind does the angler occupy a major role. He is put into a lake or river scene much as a cow or a sheep is put into a landscape, and he varies from a distant blob to a figure whose rod is recognisable. All of them in the pictures I know are freshwater fishermen.

It is refreshing to find sea angling (as distinct from commercial fishing and professional fishermen) occupying the attention of an artist. Photographers long ago realized how admirable were the lights and shades cast by the sun on slatted piers, and a lithograph exhibited in the summer exhibition of the Royal Academy shows that the same subject can prove of value to artists other than photographers.

The scene is simple. A wide platform of criss-crossed light and shade: two anglers: two bollards: a stairhead with bent railings: and a setting sun casting a path of light across sea and pier alike. The lithographer of "Evening on the Pier" is Mr. Bernhard Cheese. The exhibition, at the Burlington House, remains open until August 18.

Lough Mask Competition

Competition game fishing for fairly high money prizes has never established itself in Great Britain, and the most that the members of the winning team in, say, the annual international fly-fishing match on Loch Leven, receive for their success is a trophy, much honour, and a dinner in congenial company. It is otherwise in Ireland.

This is the fifth successive year of the World Trout Fly Fishing Competition, organised by the Castlebar and District Trout Anglers' Association and fished on Lough Mask, and it is evident that the event is proving increasingly attractive.

This year the three-day competition is to be held at Whitsun (June 8, 9 and 10). The entrance fee is £5, which seems large until it is realised that it includes the provision of boats and boatmen for each of the three days and a prize-giving dinner every night.

Prizes range from in value £5 to £150 and total £600, of which £100 is a special prize offered this year for the first time to "the best overseas rod." This is defined as the best catch among anglers domiciled outside Ireland (including Ulster) at the time of the competition and for 12 month previously. The full £100 is conditional upon there being 50 such entrants. If there are only 40 overseas entrants the extra prize would be £80, and so *pro rata*.

There is plenty of time to make arrangements to go to Lough Mask for the competition, but entries must be posted this weekend to be accepted (Hon. Secretary, C. and D.T.A.A., Main Street, Castlebar, Co. Mayo).

International Championship

Passing from game to coarse fish competitions, this year's International Angling Championship will be of interest to others besides anglers, for it is to be fished behind the Iron Curtain in Jugoslavia—though perhaps it would be better to talk about an iron mesh curtain in this instance, for it is by no means so rigid as the one sealing off the satellite countries.

Up to now I think the championship has been fished in Italy, Belgium, England and Germany—I write only from memory—and it will be something of an adventure to go so far afield.

The British team (of six) is chosen from the top men in last year's National Angling Championship. I am not much interested in match fishing, but I should certainly like to try Jugoslavian fishing, especially if time allowed a leisurely passage there and back by sea !

M.W.B. Reservoirs

Through the courtesy of the Clerk of the Metropolitan Water Board I have received a notification of the regulations governing fishing on the board's reservoirs during the 1957-58 season. These follow in general the previous regulations and I draw attention to them here because I am convinced that many London anglers are unaware of the excellent fishing that lies within a shilling's bus ride if not exactly on their doorsteps.

The species of fish inhabiting the reservoirs are not the same in every case, but over the whole system nearly every still-water species is represented. As a generalisation it can be said that roach, perch and pike are the most important, and since spinning accounts for a fair proportion of the perch and pike caught, these offer good sport to anglers who prefer active fishing to float watching. In a very incomplete list of last season's notable captures throughout the country I see that a 3½lb. perch from Walton Reservoir and a 2¾lb. roach from the Queen Mary Reservoir occupy a high position.

The season is between June 17, 1957 and March 14, 1958. There is no fishing on Sundays or Christmas Day. Season tickets cost 25s. but these are of four types, namely (1) The Walthamstow group of reservoirs for fishing on Mondays to Fridays inclusive, Bank Holidays excepted; (2) the same group for Saturday and Bank Holiday fishing; (3) as in (1) but for the Barnes and Walton groups; (4) as in (2) but for the Barnes and Walton groups.

A limited number of day tickets at 1s. each is issued, and these must be obtained in advance by post or by personal application to the M.W.B. Offices, New River Head, Rosebury Avenue, London, E.C.1. Postal applications must enclose a remittance and a stamped addressed envelope, and must show clearly the date for which the ticket is required, the group of reservoirs and the name and address of the person who will use the ticket.

Anglers who already know the drill should note that engineering works have led to the temporary suspension of angling in Lockwood, High Maynard and Low Maynard reservoirs, and in the aqueducts north of Ferry Lane, Tottenham.

I was interested to see that the Board has red-printed a warning slip about litter, with the threat that all fishing may be prohibited if litter scatterers do not mend their ways. This is in keeping with an official policy and, I trust, an improving civic conscience, that already seems to be bringing about a lessening of this nuisance.

Continental Fishing

Many British salmon and trout anglers regularly spend angling holidays in the Scandinavian countries, and a fair sprinkling visit other European countries.

It is difficult to get any figures but I imagine the number of English anglers who go to the Continent specifically for coarse fishing (except for competition fishing) must be small indeed.

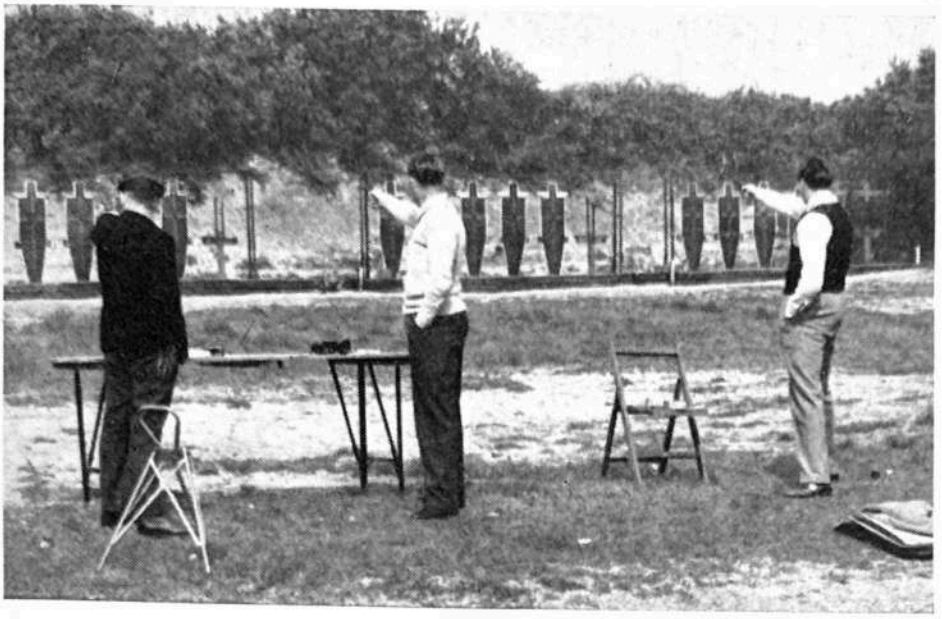
Probably passports and monetary restrictions have much to do with it. It seems certain that in more carefree days the coarse fish rivers of France were a greater attraction to English anglers than they are today.

Writing about 100 years ago Blakey said: "There is good bottom-fishing in the vicinity of Calais. A few years since we counted, within eight miles of this town, on the banks of the canal to St. Omer, *twenty-three* English anglers in one day, zealously prosecuting their calling. All were fishing for pike, or perch." I like, too, the following description from the same article: "The country all the way to Paris being comparatively flat, the rivers are thick, puddley, and sluggish."

Brook Trout

If ever a fish was given an inapposite name it is the North American one of brook trout. It is not a trout and fish of takeable size do not live in brooks. Names mean little beside sport, however, and this particular char is a first class fighting fish which seems to improve in quality the further north one goes. The world's record (14½lb.) was taken from the Nipigon River in Ontario 41 years ago, and that capture must have earned Canada several millions of dollars in the tourist trade.

American anglers by the thousand cross the Canadian border every year in search of fishing less crowded than that available in American waters near the big cities, and, as road communications improve, they and Canadian anglers extend further and further into the little exploited and almost illimitable waters of the unsettled areas of Canada. Those who can afford it use float aeroplanes and helicopters, which enable them to fish lakes and rivers debarred to those dependent upon roads and tracks.



Centre-fire duelling. Any second now the targets will be turned edge-on.

The Pistol in Competition

by Richard Arnold

PISTOL shooting is a sport with International status, and figures in the Olympic Games, both in shooting events and in the very rigorous Pentathlon. Though International standards of pistol shooting are extremely high, so far as Olympic shooting is concerned British shooters are capable of holding their own against the world's best. But this demands much practice and great devotion to the sport. Let us take a typical example. Mr. F. Cooper, with Mr. A. Steele, represented Britain in the 1956 Olympics at Melbourne and he finished in 8th place. His score was actually 8 points better than the previous British record which was established by Wing Cdr. R. F. Guy in the Finnish Olympics in 1952. I can do no better than quote from the official report of the N.S.R.A., which, after commenting upon the very difficult conditions under which Mr. Cooper fired, added:

"Undoubtedly Cooper's success was due to the long hours of practice that he put in prior to the match. During the nine days available for practice, he averaged eight hours a day, and his standard rapidly improved as a result." This is true, not only of champions, but of all enthusiastic shooters. Practice, practice, and still more practice, coupled with a willingness and readiness to acknowledge mistakes and rectify them, is the answer. The difference between the average shot and the champion lies in the fact that the champion is never too big to acknowledge that he requires continual practice: he is never satisfied.

To encourage marksmanship in pistol shooting, the N.S.R.A. inaugurated the Pistol Rating Competition, the top rating of which is the Master-Shot: other ratings being Marksman, Class "A," Class "B" and Class "C."

Slow Fire

The slow-fire competitions are fired at ranges of 10 yards, 20 yards and upwards to 50 metres. The International Slow-Fire match is fired at 50 metres, and at this range the targets look *very* small. The international course consists of 60 shots, in ten shot strings, with a maximum time limit of 20 minutes per string, *i.e.*, an average of 2 minutes per shot! Above this there is a sighting period, to begin with, of 20 minutes, a five minute break between strings and half-an-hour's rest after 30 shots. Consequently slow-fire is hardly spectacular! The shooting must be absolutely deliberate, and this requires not only a steady hold, and accurate trigger release, but a complete single-mindedness of purpose by the pistoleer.

Rapid Fire

The rapid-fire match, or silhouette match, is a different kettle of fish. In this the five all-black targets are shaped to represent the human figure, and there are scoring rings in the silhouette. The targets are placed 30 in. apart and turn on an axis so that they may be presented either edge-on or face-on to the shooter. When the pistoleer takes up his position opposite the silhouettes, which are 25 metres away, the targets look almost impossible to miss. Presented edge on, when the pistoleer, with pistol "down," calls "Ready," the targets are turned to face him. When the targets are facing him he has to raise his arm, sight the weapon and fire one shot at each target. At the end of the allotted period the targets suddenly turn edge on again and do this so quickly that any shot which is fired while they are turning is automatically a miss.

The time limit varies according to the string of shots. International Match Rapid Fire competitions have five shots in eight seconds for the first string, five shots in six seconds for the second string, and five shots in four seconds for the final string. This last is less than one second per shot, which includes raising the arm, aiming, and firing at five different targets. Consequently pistols and ammunition which have a heavy recoil operate to the detriment of the shooter, and great concentration has been given to making weapons to overcome this obstacle.

To overcome the disadvantages of heavy recoil, ingenious devices of adjustable weights, muzzle brakes and so on have been incorporated into semi-automatic pistol design. But the most ingenious has been the "upside down" pistol, models which were used very successfully by the Russians in the last Olympics. These consisted of pistols which were mounted and stocked so that they were, quite literally, upside down. There was, however, a dummy barrel for the purpose of carrying the sights, and the effect of this design was to bring the recoil straight back in line with the shooter's wrist.

But all this match shooting is a far cry from the shooting taught for military or police purposes, and vastly different from the Wild West stuff so often lauded undeservedly. Pistol match shooting and pistol shooting in war are two different matters: just as target rifle shooting is entirely divorced from military shooting. It is easy to learn how to shoot a handgun, fairly accurately and quickly, in wartime manner: it is extremely difficult to learn how to handle a single-shot pistol with precision for slow-fire shooting. But when it comes to the rapid fire match, the requirements are probably even greater. The match is scored primarily by hits, and then by numerical score and an expert's tip is to try to shoot for tens in the 8 second strings, and try for hits in the 4 second ones.

Scope and Encouragement

There is great scope for the enthusiastic pistoleer in this country and the N.S.R.A. is doing its praiseworthy utmost to encourage it. Unfortunately, however, not all club ranges are suitable for pistol shooting, as pistol ranges have to be specially approved by the War Office. These difficulties are, however, not insurmountable, and the N.S.R.A. will give every assistance to genuine enquiries.

We have some of the best pistol shots in the world in this country, and there is no reason why we should not add to their numbers. There is plenty of material available in the personnel of the various rifle clubs who have perhaps hung back because they were uncertain about the reception they would get if they proposed a pistol section. The real enthusiast who is not just attracted to a sport from its spectator appeal, but who genuinely wishes to see how things are run, and what the possibilities are, is urged to attend the N.S.R.A. National Pistol Meeting at Bisley in August, or make enquiry to the N.S.R.A. itself. The character, however, who wishes to try pistol shooting because he wishes to try out some Wild West stunts, will find that his presence is not required and, in any case, he would lack the strength of character to get down to serious practising and accept the constructive criticism which would be so freely given by others who have worked hard to achieve a high standard.

Will the next Olympic Pistol Champion in either Slow or Rapid Fire be a British pistoleer? It is not impossible by any means, and it is certainly something to look forward to.

Small-Bore Shooting

At the annual general meeting of the Oxfordshire Rifle Association it was stated that a site for an outdoor small bore range at Long Hanborough, Oxon., had been offered to the Association, and that work on the range had already begun in preparation for the county small bore meeting.

Announcing this, Lieut.-Col. R. F. Symonds, secretary, said the Association could use the Otmoor range for the annual Service rifle meeting by agreement with the Oxfordshire County Council. It was also agreed that the Association could use the range once a fortnight.

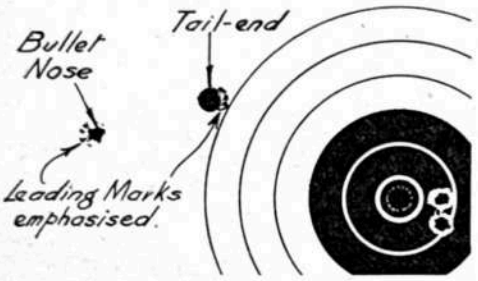
In his report, Lieut.-Col. Symonds said that 1956 was notable for the fact that it was the first time that he could remember that the Association had won one of the National Rifle Association trophies. This was the junior county championship at the N.R.A.'s meeting at Bisley, won by the Service Rifle team.

One or Two Shots?

by W. H. Fuller

SINCE the publication of my article, "The New Stats' Officer," I have received several cards with odd looking shot holes in them, but the most interesting one was from F. W. Hopkinson, one of our Olympic shots. In addition to the card, he supplies some information and asks for an opinion. I do not think it possible for the printer—not particularly our printer, but any printer—to reproduce the card to give the exact appearance of the original which contains some very light lead marks upon which I have based part of my diagnosis. I have therefore re-drawn the interesting parts and have emphasised some of the features without distorting them. The actual card has been deposited with the editor.

The essential facts are that only twelve shots were fired at the card, a normal N.S.R.A. 25-yard "sighter," but there are thirteen distinct front-entry shot-holes in it. The two interesting



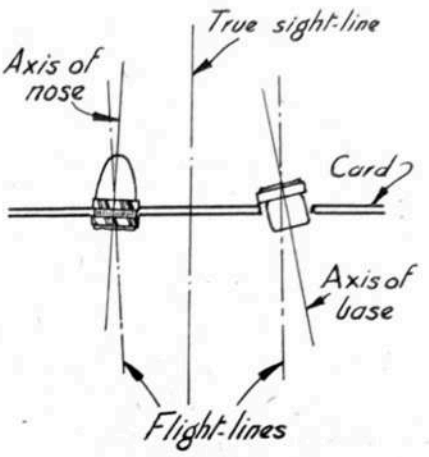
holes and an adjacent diagram only are reproduced. The two nines in the diagram are normal five-groove shotholes and compare recognisably with the other eight holes in the other four diagrams.

The left-hand hole of the interesting pair is also recognisably similar to the other normal shotholes, but the right-hand hole is almost perfectly circular, although in the original there are some slight indications of flat sides. My explanation to "Hoppy" was that a faulty bullet was loaded into the cartridge during manufacture and that the bullet separated in the barrel and two pieces then took separate flight lines.

The fault could have come about and is most likely to have done so, by a very rare set of coincidences in the manufacture of the bullet itself. Bullets of this type are usually made from plain extruded lead rod (lead in this context accepting the metal as an alloy) which is fed endwise into the bullet-making machine. The lead rod is chopped or cropped off to length as the first step in the process and as the diameter of the rod and the cropping length are accurately controlled, the weight of each billet of lead is within the limits of the accuracies required. The cropped off piece is then plunger fed into a cavity mould and forced home.

The billet, as a bullet, although further work is caried out at a later stage, is then cleared from the cavity which is then ready for the next billet. The lead rods are of reasonable lengths for handling and the operator feeds a new length of rod into the machine against the tail end of the previous one. The odd pieces at the ends of each rod which do not meet the cropping length distance drop clear of the cavity and are not fed into it. In this case, however, it appears that the two odd pieces did get fed into the cavity and that the pressure of the ram was sufficient to bind them together, not only in the mould, but in all subsequent operations.

When the cartridge was fired the two pieces came unstuck, and it is possible to presume from



the evidence that the front piece with its canneluring took to the grooves and made the hole on the left but the rear piece had no rotation imparted to it, and having a more or less flat, or at least blunt end, punched the nice clean hole on the right. In spite of the apparent very large hole, a 22in. shot hole gauge fits it almost as well as any other hole on the card, and has a similar amount of drag when removed.

It can also be diagnosed from the lead marks round both holes that both pieces of bullet were turning trans-axially in flight, and my second sketch shows their probable angular displacement as they went through the card.

☆

Dry Shooting

by David Stone

THE members of our club will try almost anything that they wishfully think may improve their shooting. They will even read books on the subject and cheerfully accept the consequences. They will listen avidly to any theory put forward, no matter by whom.

To illustrate my meaning, only last season, John Brown, our secretary, who is, if you remember, in his spare time, the landlord of the Lion, decided to organise a series of lectures for our benefit, entitled "How to top up your average." They were delivered in the saloon bar, once a week for something like six weeks and strangely enough, for each lecture the saloon was crowded to capacity.

We sat through the lectures patiently enough although John thoughtfully restrained himself from cramming too much knowledge into us, leaving something for the barman to fill in, which he was always prepared to do. Approximately at the end of each paragraph, each and every one of us was being regularly topped up until we had to plead with him to desist, and allow John to get on with his lecture.

Decline and Fall

And when I tell you that immediately following those lectures we lost four league matches in quick succession and were unceremoniously knocked out of the Scurry Cup, the Brewers Shield, the League Trophy and one or two other local competitions, the importance of those lectures cannot be underrated.

In the same vein, I remember Bob Crackett, one of our oldest members saying one evening, that, "there is nothing like a session of dry shooting to improve your shooting." Although for the life of me, I just cannot imagine old Bob dry shooting off the sitting room carpet for an hour of an evening! But he insists that he does. If he does, then it has no apparent effect upon his shooting!

Quite a character Bob, in his way, but never somehow taken really seriously, although on that particular evening when he made the statement about dry shooting, there followed such a stampede of members towards their homes, clutching rifles, pads and various odd pieces of shooting paraphernalia, as has not been seen since the days of the gold rush.

A Colourful Figure

It could be the way that Bob dresses that strikes you, on first seeing him. He shoots in a faded khaki jacket that is almostly completely covered with an array of multi-coloured badges and odd pieces of leather padding. Bob claims that he wore this self-same jacket throughout the Gallipoli campaign and I for one can see no reason at all to doubt the statement. To complete his shooting attire, he sports a pair of trousers of similar vintage which also have some historical value; they are, he says the trousers in which he cut a dashing figure on the polo grounds of Poona.

His appearance could be taken to indicate a character inclined to the eccentric, and you would not be completely wrong. In spite of it, Bob is a very likeable, generous fellow whose opinions are, at times, seriously considered; at any rate, that one was, by me at least and I decided to have a go at this "dry shooting" that he so firmly advocated.

An evening or two later I took my equipment home to try it. Oh yes, I was conscientious about it, even to the extent of mathematically scaling down a target to fix up on the wall. Complete then, with shooting jacket, pads, telescope and my rifle, I got down to it on the sitting room floor with hardly any trouble at all. Moving the settee out into the hall did present certain difficulties for I am nothing of a carpenter and the subsequent task of putting the door frame back to its original position was something of a problem. What was not so easy was to persuade my son that I was not a sort of Davy Crockett, without a hat! Moving the table out into the kitchen was not popular with some; my wife, for instance, insisted on it being moved a second time. Being jammed between the sink and the gas stove was no way at all, in her opinion, of spending an evening at home. The piano was also something of a problem because whichever way I lay, my right foot came down hard on the fortissimo pedal. This would have been of no consequence had my daughter not been practising at the time.

But I did eventually get down, clear of any obstruction. "Don't be daft! You'll never get up again tonight!" my wife exclaimed, with, it seemed to me, a suspicion of sarcasm, but I may have been wrong at that!

"Good old Daddy!" yelled my youngest son, at the same making a wild lunge on to my back with such violence that the backsight of my rifle almost displaced my eye, permanently.

"Champion the Wonder Horse," he sang lustily, kicking his heels vigorously into my sides.

I am of the opinion that television is a menace in the home.

Yes, persevere with your "dry shooting" I implore you, then your wife will be only too glad to see you get your regular nights down at the club—in fact she will probably insist on it.

Old Bob knew what he was talking about I'm certain.

Woodpigeon Shooting

by Charles Coles

Since we receive many letters from tyros and young shots asking us a number of questions about how best to shoot pigeon over decoys, we print the elementary article below for their benefit.—Editor.

PIGEON shooting is an all-the-year round sport. Equally good bags can be made in the harvest fields in high summer, when it is too hot to wear a jacket, as in the depths of winter when snow covers all but the tops of a few green crops that are attracting the hungry grey hordes.

In some ways it is akin to wildfowling : it is often a solitary sport. Neither beater, nor dog, nor ferret can help show the game. The shooter must place himself where the birds are flighting, or, alternatively, decoy them to a food crop, or to a drinking pool, beside which he has built his hide. If he has the opportunity, he will be wise to study the feeding habits and local flight lines of the pigeon beforehand—or at least to ask those who live on the spot.

Marksmanship is not enough : the shooter who succeeds best will have a good knowledge of woodcraft and fieldcraft.

Now that rabbits are few and far between, the woodpigeon has come into its own as the best possible live "target" upon which to train the young shooter. And although pigeon shooting may be called the "poor man's sport," the really good game shots who have known the finest grouse and the tallest pheasants, will always confess to enjoying a good day at pigeon as much as anything in the world. There are times when a glass of champagne is no substitute for a pint of cool beer!

A comfortable hide of bales beside a newly-sown cornfield.

Pigeon that have come in to roost or have settled to feed near decoys can be shot with the smaller-bore guns, but I would not recommend a weapon smaller than a 20-bore for ordinary pigeon shooting. The 12-bore is the best all-round gun, and choke barrels will be an advantage, though not a necessity. Ordinary cartridges, with the standard game charge, are perfectly satisfactory. Opinions differ as to the best size of shot to use. No. 5s are handy in case sitting shots are to be taken. (When taking sitting shots, put the gun up slowly and take deliberate aim at the feet : otherwise you are likely to shoot high.) No. 6 and No. 7 are recommended for flying birds. Maximum cartridges are real long-range "stoppers," but are not advised for shooting a hundred pigeon in shirt-sleeve weather.

Shy and Suspicious

Pigeon have an exceptionally keen sense of sight, and are shy and suspicious. They will sheer off at any sudden movement, or at the glint of gun-barrels. When waiting for pigeon to come in, the shooter should not show an upturned face, or move his hands suddenly. His clothes should be subdued and should merge in with the surroundings. This applies to both flight shooting and shooting from hides.

If the weather is not too hot, special veils—with holes for the eyes—can be worn across the face, but some people find them rather stuffy. Burnt cork or "jungle" make-up are more comfortable, though messy. The experts rarely use such refinements : with their experience, they probably do not need to. It is probably better not to use a dog. Unless exceptionally well-trained it is more likely to be a hindrance than a help. Wounded birds should be watched : they often fly for some distance, settle in a tree, and then drop dead.

When flighting pigeon, it is usually possible to find some cover at the edge of a ride or wood, but it will sometimes pay to erect a screen of cut branches, or hang a piece of camouflage netting between two trees. If you find a good vantage point, which always provides good sport, it may be worthwhile to build a permanent hide there.

A sackful of shot pigeon can rarely be obtained by just wandering about the countryside with a gun. An exception to this, however, is in August when the young are beginning to fly. A very killing method is to walk belts and thick hedgerows with two guns, one on either side. If the belt is a long one, a third gun should head it—creeping quietly in to position without being seen or heard by the birds.

Big Bags of Pigeon

There are two main ways of securing big bags of pigeon—shooting during the late afternoon as the birds come in to roost, and decoying.

The pigeon drive—sometimes called "battue shooting"—consists of concerted shooting over a wide area. It is essential not to leave a single undisturbed roosting place in the area. This means that the shooting must be synchronised over a whole county. This is organised by the County Pests Officer, who will usually be only too glad to tell sportsmen where they can get shooting. He may have appointed a local pigeon shooting organiser for your area. The local cartridge dealer can often help, too.

If there are not enough shooters to go round, a rope of "bangers" or bird-scarers in an isolated wood will keep the pigeon from settling. When the main flight is over and pigeon become disinclined to leave their roosts, it is a good idea for one gun to patrol the woods firing an occasional shot to get the birds on the move again. On a starlit night with a clear sky—particularly if there is snow on the ground—pigeon can be shot at roost some time after the flight is over. Not, however, in pheasant coverts! Battue shooting usually takes place twice a week from mid-January onwards.

Shooters who leave farm gates open, who damage property, who scare farm stock, or who shoot anything other than pigeon or vermin, will give their fellow sportsmen a bad name. They cannot expect to be asked again.

Shooting Over Decoys

The really heavy bags of woodpigeon are made by decoying. This is not only the most killing way of controlling these expensive pests, but is by far the most exciting.

A decoy is merely a dummy bird set up to imitate a pigeon—usually in the feeding position. Three or four decoys can be effective, but the more there are, the bigger will be the drawing power. Dead pigeon can be added to the decoys as they are shot. These should be set up in lifelike positions by propping them up on sharp twigs that just penetrate the crop. In very hot weather spraying with fly-repellant will ward off the bluebottles.

There are many decoys on the market, but some are badly shaped and coloured and far too shiny. Max Baker-type decoys are among those that are extremely effective, comparatively inexpensive and easy to carry about. They will move gently in the wind on their steel pins, and if they should swing round they can easily be wedged in position with twigs or small divots of turf. This should be done so that the decoys can still rock back and forth. Decoys can also be made to move realistically by mounting them on a piece of spring steel about the strength of a hack-saw blade. This should be fixed into a split wooden peg which can be raised or lowered to the ground according to the force of the wind.

There are also solid wooden decoys which are used mainly for placing on the top of corn stooks, or as "sentry" decoys in trees not too far from the ground decoys. These tree-top decoys will help to draw pigeon from a long way off. Some models are designed to be hoisted up into position by catapulting a counter-weight, attached to a length of string, over a suitable branch thus enabling the decoy to be pulled up. Others can be lofted into position by means of a telescopic pole or, in the case of low scrubby trees, an ordinary pole cut on the spot. Climbing irons also have their uses.

In addition, there are moving decoys—usually set in motion by pulling a piece of string from the hide—which will also lure birds down from some distance away. Other wing-flapping models rely on a gentle breeze for movement.

The decoys—placed at all angles except tail-to-wind—should be arranged in a rough semi-circle some twenty-five yards away from the hide, as though feeding.

Several guns with hides and decoys shooting together are a distinct advantage, provided they are not too near to each other : a quarter of a mile is probably close enough. By this practice a number of different crops can be covered and the birds kept on the move.

Pigeon can be shot all day long—certainly in hard weather when they are hungry—but probably the best times are from daybreak until about 9 a.m., and during the afternoon. The experienced pigeon shot will be in his hide at daybreak. Pigeon come hungry from their roosts and make at once for their feed.

It is illegal to tether a live bird as a decoy.

Useful equipment for hide-making includes a billhook, some strong string, and a sack as a hold-all. Existing cover—such as fences and bushes—that may be used as a hide can usually be found easily enough and, if necessary, improved by adding cut branches, etc. Additions should consist only of "greenery" that looks natural and probably grows on the spot. A good hide must be unobtrusive and resemble its background. It must allow a gun to be swung freely: it should not be uncomfortable. It can have an open or closed top according to choice. The height is also a matter of individual preference. Some men prefer to sit on a shooting stick or box and peer out through a screen of leaves, whilst others like to stand behind a hide that is roughly chin high. A closed-top hide must have a wide port or window in the front through which the gunner can shoot. It is not likely, however, that he will be able to kill birds other than on the ground or just coming in to land.

When deciding which way the hide should face, it should be remembered that pigeon invariably come in to land head to wind.

A ditch is often a valuable site for a hide, and can easily be transformed into a sunken butt. Hides in cornfields can consist of sheaves either set up against any simple framework or simply propped together. Similarly in a pea field; pea-boxes can be piled up to form a rough stack which will serve as a natural-looking hide: straw bales can sometimes be used in the same way. Portable hides can be made from three sheep hurdles, about five feet long, lashed together in the form of an open triangle. Many other refinements and decorations can be added to this sort of wattle hide, which can be easily carried on the roof of a car. Other lightweight, portable hides can be made from a skeleton framework of telescopic aluminium poles with some fine-mesh camouflage netting and foliage if necessary. The poles should have steel prongs at one end enabling them to be pushed into the ground and remain firm.

Decoying at Drinking Pools

In stone-wall country, material such as sacking can be used without being conspicuous. In covert, boughs such as spruce can be made into a rough hut with an open top, about seven foot high all round. For its site choose a clearing on the line of flight.

I have already mentioned water. Pigeon are thirsty birds and a hide at drinking places—especially those with shallow margins—will nearly always be a success. In hot weather, nothing will keep away birds that have been feeding on peas or corn. Decoys can be placed at the water's edge or set up on suitable fencing posts.

These short notes are but an outline of a wonderful sport, about which much has been written. There are, incidentally, quite a few controversial points about which experts differ, e.g. whether one should gather or leave unpicked the shot birds that have fallen around the decoys, whether it is necessary to remove the eyelids of a shot pigeon which is to be set up as a decoy, and so on. Some guns laugh at the idea of using No. 7 for pigeon shooting, whilst others would not dream of using anything else. If you cannot get good advice from experienced local pigeon shooters, please write to me at I.C.I. Game Reserve, and I will do my best to help you.

Wildfowling Clubs

The Wildfowlers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland: Hon. Secretary, Lt.-Commdr. J. W. Anderton, R.N.V.R., 19 Castle Street, Liverpool, 2.

* * *

ON Saturday, May 4, the Kent Wildfowlers' Association held their third annual dinner at the Coniston Hotel, Sittingbourne. The 91 members and friends who sat down to dine greatly appreciated the change of venue for this year as the facilities at the hotel gave us the opportunity for meeting all our friends informally in the main bar/lounge.

In the absence of our president, Mr. F. F. A. Burden, M.P., who almost at the last minute was unable to preside owing to Government business, Mr. Don Brown, a vice-president, kindly took the chair. After the loyal toast, he proposed the toast of the "Kent Wildfowlers." He took as his theme the need for continued co-operation with other bodies, and particularly welcomed our guests from the East Sussex Gun Club and Wildfowlers' Association, and the Kent Ornithological Society, together with Mr. Gaze who had made available pigeon shooting as soon as the fowling season ended. Some 40-50 members had taken advantage of his kindness. Our chairman for the evening also paid tribute to the officers and committee for their work, and congratulations to Mr. D. G. Ward on winning the Vermin Competition with a total of 68 head. Over 1,200 head of vermin had been accounted for by members during the year.

Mr. David Jones, our secretary, replied on behalf of the Association. In a most witty and apt speech, he thanked the chairman for the evening for his tribute, and mentioned some of the work of preservation and co-operation that was going on at the present time. He also thanked Dr. James Harrison, one of our vice-presidents for drawing the most delightful picture that decorated the menu. It depicted an association of ducks and geese sitting down to their annual dinner awaiting the main dish of roast wildfowler! It was inspired by a report in the *Star* evening paper on the activities of the Kent *Wildfowl* Club.

Our secretary went on to mention that on one of our reserves the entire hatch of wild ducklings had been literally snatched from the water by carrion crows and stressed the need for continuing the reduction of these pests by all possible means. Finally, he read a letter from Peter Scott informing him that the Wildfowl Trust had enthusiastically accepted certain recommendations of our scientific adviser, Dr. Jeffery Harrison, in connection with the viscera the Association were sending the Trust. Almost 70 viscera had been sent to them to date and we had promised a substantial increase for next year. As a result of this, Peter Scott felt that the Medway and Swale should be the first area in the country where their field work should be undertaken. The importance of this co-operation between wildfowlers and the Wildfowl Trust cannot be over stressed. One of the immediate results of the scientific study of the area will be that shooting is assured. It should also produce "more ducks in the air," when food preferences have been discovered and suitable action taken.

After the dinner the room was prepared for Jim Powell and John Ruxton from the Westmorland Club who showed us some magnificent coloured slides of a visit to the Farne Islands; a most instructive and amusing series on safety in gun handling; and after a further interval for suitable refreshment, a series on wild geese on their feeding grounds, including some wonderful photographs of the birds in flight. Surely some of these latter pictures are unique in bird photography? All felt a great debt to these two immensely keen wildfowlers who not only obtained the pictures but came all the way from Westmorland to give us such a delightful evening.

* * *

The annual general meeting of The Chichester Harbour Wildfowlers' Association was held on May 4 at their headquarters, The Bull's Head, Fishbourne, Near Chichester.

In opening the meeting, the chairman, Capt. Matt Normington, said that he was glad to welcome those present to the first annual general meeting of the Association. As there was a good deal of business to be got through, he would not waste time in repeating what the Association had accomplished during the last twelve months, particularly as a full report had been circularised to all members.

The minutes of the inaugural meeting were then read and approved. The secretary's report followed, this covering much of a full report of the Association's activities sent to all members prior to the meeting. It showed that fully paid-up membership was in excess of the 170-mark. Mr. Bjornsen pointed out that the Christmas Draw had been a great aid to funds, and that an even larger one would be organised this year. It was unfortunate that a number of members had asked for a considerable number of tickets to sell, and had returned only a few, or, in one or two cases, none at all. They were, however, in the minority, and a great many members did Trojan work in selling tickets, and also in offering prizes.

The secretary emphasised once more that the subscription of 15s. included insurance, and that all members shooting on organised shoots, or on Chichester Harbour, whether on land or afloat, are insured against third party risks for the sum of £50,000. He talked of the poor wildfowling season and of the four flight shoots held, followed by get-togethers. The latter had ben a little disappointing, but, with the formation of an Entertainments Committee, these would be improved upon next season. It was our first year, and we had learned many lessons by trial and error—i.e. the hard way. However, some of the activities of the Association had proved most successful, including the film show (to which members of the public were invited free) at the Town Hall Assembly Rooms at Chichester which the Association rented for the evening, and at which the aims and objects of wildfowlers, and the Association in particular, were made quite clear to the audience. Thus, by and large, the Association had not done at all badly in its first year, and a very full programme was in mind for the future.

The treasurer then made his report, this showing that the financial position of the Association is very satisfactory. The balance sheet was handed round, and a short discussion followed.

One member of the Association, not altogether happy about the large numbers of members, had tabled a motion that membership might be limited. The aims and objects of W.A.G.B.I. and individual wildfowling associations were fully ex-

(Continued on page 414, col. 2)

Members of the Kent Wildfowlers' Association after their annual dinner.

Gundog News

Conducted by P. R. A. MOXON, Herne Common, Herne Bay, Kent

BROWSING through that masterly old work "Dog Breaking," by General W. N. Hutchinson, I came across a reference to the cunning of old age in dogs. The author mentions an aquaintance who shot over a pointer bitch until she was eighteen years of age, when "she could do no more than crawl up the side of a hill, occasionally, to gain time, making false points. Once on top, however, she would work merrily downwards, no false points then . . . but canine veterans, of however invalided a constitution, if they have been really first-rate in their youth, are not always to be despised. Occasionally you may come across one who will, from his past experience and superior nose, prove a more valuable auxiliary in the field than many a campaigner of greater activity and vigour . . ."

Remembering that this "bible" of dog trainers was written over a hundred years ago, when there was plenty of game and (for the few) far more time and opportunity for dog training and shooting, one wonders if aged dogs can still be found a place in the field today. Of course everything is conducted at a greater pace nowadays—no muzzle loaders, less game and, consequently, more ground to be covered and, above all, the great demand for pace and style from dogs working to the gun.

However, for all this, I still believe that many of us are apt to "pension off" our older dogs before their span of usefulness is over. As General Hutchinson wrote, many an old dog has such vast experience and practised nose that it will make a useful gamefinder. It makes up for its lack of pace by making more certain of its ground, and working out scents under difficult conditions which a younger and less experienced dog would make a hash of. Indeed, in certain circumstances a fast dog *can* be too fast for its nose (though not as often as believed), and I am quite sure that a lot of young dogs, though possessing good noses, are too impatient to use them properly when scenting conditions are bad.

American Veterans

I have frequently been interested to note how, in America, the veteran dogs seem to hold their own in trials. Indeed, among retrievers in particular, the dogs over there seldom seem to come into their best form until about five years or thereabouts. Over here we are apt to write off a five year old—at any rate as far as trials are concerned—as being past its prime and too slow. If the Americans, who demand pace and style if anyone does, can find their older dogs useful, surely we can do so over here. Of course, a great deal depends upon the physical condition of the old dogs and this, I believe, is the crux of the whole matter. So many factors contribute to the physical state of a dog that it is sometimes difficult to prevent a veteran from deteriorating rapidly. Dogs of active breeds, and those which in their younger days led very active lives, are apt to put on excess weight very rapidly, just as are athletes who suddenly lessen their activities in the sporting field. I read the other day that, in human, every extra pound of weight above normal that we carry around entails the heart pumping blood through three miles of blood vessels that it would otherwise not have to serve. If the same strain, proportionately, is thrown upon the dog, we can easily visualise the dangers and strains of overweight.

Incorrect feeding and insufficient exercise undoubtedly contribute more than any other factors to excessive weight and loss of condition in a dog. On the other hand, where dogs are well-fed and receive abundant exercise they tend to remain in good working condition for many years. I know of numerous keepers' dogs which still work like Trojans at eight, nine and ten years of age, and one or two of our leading kennels have had dogs which aquitted themselves well at trials at an age when many people would have "retired" them. In every case the animal has been slim and hard, and has shown that past experience can more than make up for the extra "zip" that was noticeable among the two- and three-year olds.

Mrs. A. S. Balding and Dr. J. B. Maurice at the Southern and Western Counties Field Trial Society's Spring Meeting held at Sutton Scotney.

In order to prolong as much as possible the working life of a gundog it should be fed properly from the start. Not just from training age, but right from weaning. Raw meat and bones, ample and graduated exercise are the three "musts," but there is another factor which I consider to be important. This is to keep the dog young in mind as well as in body, and how can one do this better than by giving it the opportunity to carry out the work which it loves and for which it was bred? By retiring a gundog from the shooting field early one causes it to lose interest in life, in just the same way as do many active business men who are forced to retire at a certain age. I have witnessed with regret the speedy deterioration in both humans and dogs which have been forced into retirement when, though getting on in years, they have still had active minds and bodies.

Preventing Pottering

Nobody loves the fast and stylish dog more than I do, and nobody could more loathe shooting over a potterer which snuffles and grunts along like a disinterested pig and finds only the game which I could kick up for myself. However, it is not only the old dogs which potter. Some dogs never do anything else and they are not worth bothering about. Many more dogs become potterers through lack of condition and opportunity at much too early an age, and this could be prevented in most cases. Between the true potterer and the really fast dog we have the average gundog which is what is wanted by the shooting man for ordinary work. It goes with pleasing style, covers sufficient ground, adjusts its pace to its nose and the scenting conditions of the day, and is not difficult to handle. Such a dog, if correctly fed, exercised and trained from the start, should see its owner through many seasons in the field.

The range of gundogs—be they bird-dogs, spaniels or retrievers— is a subject of interest to all handlers. A wide variation in the demands of handlers for various types of work is unavoidable. It all depends upon the type of ground being worked. In the case of pointers and setters, as mentioned last week, you may require a wide-ranging or a close-ranging dog, depending on whether you are working wide moors or small fields, and whether game is scarce or plentiful. Retrievers are expected to work over phenominal distances at trials at times, whereas the ordinary shooting man does not like his dog to go too far and thus disturb unshot ground. Spaniel handlers, whether at trials or out shooting, like their dogs to acquire a regular beat within shot of them, and only to exceed this when put out to retrieve a distant bird or a runner.

Teaching a dog to range properly occupies a good deal of the trainer's time, and it may take even years of experience to get a dog to vary its range to suit different conditions, which is the ideal for which we strive. The average

The Earl of Northesk, Mr. M. B. Lester and Mr. J. Arthur Rank cast expert eyes on the trials.

owner, with limited opportunities for training and shooting, is better off if he contents himself to instil in his dog a range suitable for the general run of work likely to come its way. If he tries to be too ambitious he may ruin the dog. For general shooting I imagine that any dog is likely to be most useful if it has a comparatively short range. In this way it will not miss game, if a pointer or setter, or disturb fresh ground if a retriever. If it is a spaniel you will require a limited range in any case, and whichever breed of dog you are training you will find that the natural tendency is always to pull out away from you. In other words, it is better to teach close ranging, even if it does appear at times that the pupil is *too* close. With experience and excitement in the shooting field the dog will soon show a tendency to pull out, and it is far easier to teach a close ranger to get further away than it is to persuade a wide ranger to work closer in.

On this subject General Hutchinson has some wise words to say in his book. "You must expect that your young dog will make some sad mistakes in his range; but be not discouraged. Doubtless there is no one thing—I was going to say no dozen things—in the whole art of dog breaking which are so difficult to attain, or which exact so much labour, as a high, well confirmed systematic range. Nature will not assist you—you must do it all yourself. But in recompense there is nothing so advantageous when it is at length acquired. It will abundantly repay months of persevering exertion. It constitutes the grand criterion of excellence. Its attainment makes a dog of inferior nose and action far superior to one of much greater natural qualifications, who may be tomfooling about, galloping backwards and forwards sometimes over identically the same ground, quite uselessly exerting his travelling powers; now and then, indeed, arrested by the suspicion of a haunt, which he is not experienced enough, or sufficiently taught, to turn to good account; and occasionally brought to a stiff point on birds accidentally found right under his nose. It is undeniable, *cæteris paribus*, that the dog who hunts his ground most according to rule must in the end find most game."

I consider the above paragraph to be a masterpiece of wisdom and sound advice. The General was writing of pointers and setters, of course, but his words apply with equal force to *all* gundogs. I particularly like the expression "tomfooling about," which is exactly what we see so many dogs doing, especially those which have been given too much early training on "working to hand." Such dogs, particularly retrievers which have come to rely too much upon directions from their handler, tend to "dry up" as far as use of nose is concerned, and simply gallop about aimlessly in the directions indicated by him.

Beating Their Ground

Many of the best working springers I have trained, for instance, soon acquired a good range and system of beating their ground, with very little assistance from me. Perhaps they might have to be checked by call or whistle, and turned by signal or movement on my part, but apart from this they seemed to know, instinctively, that their range limit was within gunshot of me.

It is certainly true that nothing gives a handler so much satisfaction as working a dog with a good and systematic range, and method of treating ground, as mentioned in his report on the Spaniel Championship by Mr. Joe Greatorex (whom, incidentally, I hope to quote at some length on the same topic next week). There will be no argument with General Hutchinson's statement that the dog which hunts its ground according to rule must in the end find most game, and that is what really matters.

* * *

I regret that, owing to an oversight, the results of the Puppy Stake and the Non-Winner stake were omitted from my report of the Southern and Western Field Trial Society's "bird-dog" trials at Sutton Scotney last week. They were as follows: Puppy Stake: 1, Mr. J. A. Rank's pointer Scotney Blackfield Arco (D. Munro); 2, Mr. J. Nash's Irish setter Moanruad Chilly Breeze. Non-Winner Stake: 1, Mr. Rank's pointer Scotney Lenwade Willow (D. Munro); 2, Mr. Rank's pointer Scotney Cavalier (A. Manners); 3, Mr. Rank's Scotney Lenwade Wherry (D. Munro). Reserve, Mr. Rank's pointer Scotney Greek (A. Manners).

* * *

The next training class of the South Eastern Gundog Society will be held on Brigadier Schreiber's estate at Boxhill on May 26. Meet at the entrance to Wentworth Hall, Headley Lane, Mickleham, at 2.30 p.m.

WILDFOWLING CLUBS

(Continued from page 412)

plained to him. He learned the value of strength in numbers, and how, if any over-shooting was at all likely (which it is not), it could be controlled by the Association. Gratefully he assured the meeting that, as a newcomer to this sort of thing, he was now fully alive to the facts and withdrew his motion.

Other matters arising on the agenda and dealt with included: Flight Shoots; Christmas Draw; Library; Proposed Visit to Slimbridge; Clay Pigeon Shooting; Affiliation Fee to W.A.G.B.I.

Regarding the last item, Mr. "Tim" Sedgwick gave a brief review of W.A.G.B.I.'s affairs and urged and proposed that the affiliation fee of hitherto 1s. 6d. per member be raised, at W.A.G.B.I.'s request to 2s. 6d. per member. This would not mean raising the subscription to the Association of 15s. The proposition was carried unanimously.

Taking the other items on the agenda mentioned above and reporting on them very, very briefly: Flight shoots and get-togethers will be organised again this coming season and members will be notified of dates in good time. A list of library books available to members for a small borrowing fee will shortly reach all members. More will soon be heard about the proposed outing to The Wildfowl Trust which will take place if sufficient members are intersted in it. Arrangements are going forward to secure a clay pigeon shooting "range" and an instructor, and members will be advised about this later. The election of officers for the ensuing year followed. The following officers were re-elected: Chairman, Capt. M. Normington; vice-chairman, N. M. ("Tim") Sedgwick; hon. secretary, S. M. Bjornsen; hon. treasurer, F. Fosberry. Committee members: Sqd.-Ldr. P. Hill, Sgt. Hollingworth, R. Sewell, W. Gray, L. P. Rush, P. A. Fisher, R. Humphrey. New committee members: B. Welch and B. E. T. Kirby.

In spite of petrol rationing, it is a disappointing fact that there were just under forty members present at the meeting, and the secretary asked for much better support at all events in future. It was hardly right, he said, that all the work should fall on a very few shoulders, and members should at least offer better support by doing their best to turn up at as many events as possible. These events often took a considerable amount of organising and better attendance would be much appreciated.

Mr. Peter Rush asked for it to be put on record that he emphasised the excellent and hard work put in by the secretary and treasurer, and there is no doubt that these two officials deserve every praise for their often arduous labours.

The chairman thanked all present for giving their support to the meeting, and hoped that the Association would go from strength to strength.

"T.-B."

* * *

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

A meeting of the Executive Committee of the Wildfowlers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland, will be held at the Grand Hotel, Birmingham, on Saturday, June 22, at 2 p.m.

Clay Pigeon Shooting

Fixture List

May 24 & 25: Welsh Open D.T.L. Championship Meeting, North Wales G.C., Rhosesmor, Mold, Flintshire.

May 25: Waltham Abbey G.C. Open Shoot. 1 p.m.

May 25: Northumberland D.T.L. Championship and Open Shoot, Ashington G.C., Longhurst.

May 25: Waltham Abbey G.C. Open Shoot.

May 26: Beverley and District G.C. 2 p.m. Members' Shoot.

May 26: Birmingham G.C., Brockhill Lane, Redditch. 10.15 a.m.

May 28: Bedford and District G.C., Elstow. Fensome Cup Event.

May 31 & June 1: C.P.S.A.'s 54th Annual English Open D.T.L. Championship Meeting, Northolt, Middx.

* * *

The Piccadilly Gun Club, Doncaster, is holding practice shoots during British Summer Time as follows: 2nd Sunday in each month—afternoon. 1st and 3rd Thursdays in each month—evenings.

* * * *

Reports and Results

The Easter Saturday shoot at **Blandford Gun Club** started the season with a record entry of fifty-eight guns. Gloom spread through the office very early in the day when a few spots of rain arrived at the same time as a competitor from Cornwall who announced that the rain had been with him all the way up. He was likened unto a Job's comforter, but fortunately the rain must have been diverted, because nothing more was seen of it, and there was also very little wind to upset the clays. Trappers, traps and clays behaved well all day although by the end of it the trappers must have had just about enough.

The Dorset Down-the-Line Championship was won by R. D. Browning with fifty first-barrel kills; he also collected the I.C.I. Shield. Class A winners were: 1, F. M. McFarland, 99 points; 2, A. J. Beal, 97; 3, A. E. Browning 96. Class B: 1, A. Pickard, 99 points; 2, R. Walker, 97; 3, F. Cooper, 95. Class C: 1, J. Wright, 94 points; 2, C. J. Thorne, 88; 3. R. T. Akers, 87.

The Skeet Championship was shot over two rounds in the afternoon and was easily won by Ray Wensley with a champion's forty straight and he must be congratulated on this double skeet twenty.

Class A winners were: 1, G. A. Morin, 39 kills; 2, R. E. Dutton, 39; 3, R. D. Browning, 38, and I.C.I. Shield. Class B: 1, A. Dewbrey, 38; 2, H. Brunt, 36; 3, J. Wright, 34. Class C: 1, A. Pickard, 34; 2, H. B. Readings, 33; 3, C. Scammell, 32.

There was a Colts' Competition both for Down-the-Line and for Skeet and both were won by M. D. McFarland.

* * *

The **Surrey Area Championship** shoot was held at Bisley on May 5 under rather unfavourable weather conditions, there being a strong head wind most of the day. Despite this, there were five competitors in the 50 bird event who managed to get possibles on handicap.

The worthy winner of the Shield, which is for Surrey residents only, was R. A. Denham with a very good 95. There being no novices from Surrey, the Pewter Tankard was not awarded.

In the Open event of this shoot, the H/Gun prize was won by R. A. Denham, with W. R. de Rosenwerth and G. E. Woodford 2nd and 3rd. In the Handicap class, R. T. A. Akers won the tie shoot (which was not under distance handicap rules), with R. H. Good (a new member of the club) and H. F. Sherwood in the other two places.

The Handicap-by-Distance was won by R. A. Denham, with A. M. Browning and L. H. Willis in the other positions, and the 1st Miss Out competition was won by G. E. Woodford with H. B. Readings as runner-up.

Mrs. R. Walker very kindly distributed all the above prizes, and in addition, handed out to the Bisley members, the mementos they had won in the two shoots against Blandford last year.

Mrs. Walker was warmly thanked by the president, and was accorded the usual three cheers, and the now familiar Bisley "whisper."

After the shoot, the committee had a long meeting, and during it arranged the programme until March next year. A copy of this will be sent to all members prior to the next meeting. This, by the way, will be held on Sunday, May 26, when the Readhead Rosebowl will be the main prize, and for which there is always some very keen competition.

The Ford Escort—Spacewagon

by Our Motoring Correspondent

I AM still concentrating on the lower-priced and small engined Estate Cars which give high mileage, comfort and general utility, both in town and country.

With the furtherance of this subject in view, I left the Southern Railway at Weybridge Station and was met by a charming young man and an attractive green Escort-Spacewagon.

This name, reminiscent of the modern trend in cartoon strips (it is official and not my own fancy) is reasonably justified, since Ford of Dagenham, in the smallest model of its type which they produce, have certainly made available a very handy luggage area, particularly when the rear seat is folded away.

The Escort is pleasant to look at and rides smoothly and solidly on the ordinary grade "B" road at 55 miles per hour; (It will do an easy 10 m.p.h. more, but not with me at the wheel, since I do not like a car's top speed for speed's sake).

Light Steering

The steering is light, and while admirably suited to the so-called weaker sex and certainly less tiring on a long trip on the highway, I, personally, prefer more oversteer on rough ground and deeply rutted tracks where you can spare your car a lot of bumps and heavy going, if you can "feel" your way, as well as see it.

The springing is excellent, and if over a series of pot-holes taken at speed there is a slight tendency to "surgee," this is of no importance in comparison with the fine performance on the road, where, after all, one spends most of one's time.

The 1.172cc engine, amply powerful for this little vehicle, is that same lively and well-proven engine which has popularised the ubiquitous Ford Prefect, and which will give you up to 40 m.p.g., under normal running conditions.

Inside, the Escort is economically, but soundly fitted throughout, with the instrument panel built on the steering column, clearly visible through the two-spoke steering wheel.

Apart from the speedometer, etc., there are four indicator lamps—one for ignition, one for flashing trafficators, a very cunning one to tell you whether your head-lamp is dipped and my *bête noire*, the oil indicator warning lamp. I have already complained about these, as I fail to see what happens should the bulb break or a connection go, short of running your engine dry, whereas when the old pressure gauge showed nil, it was simple to jump out and check your dipstick.

A Boon For Shoppers

The enormous glove or parcel tray, which extend from the steering column to the left hand door, is an absolute boon for shopping, picnic meals and the mixed impedimenta of the motorist.

The central gear lever (three forward gears), and the hand brake are both conveniently placed and come easily to hand. Incidentally, the brakes are thoroughly good and effective throughout and the foot-brake has no tendency to "snatch," even when stamped on violently.

The two front seats are comfortable and well-upholstered and both fold forward to give access to the rear seat. Even so, the doors being only 28 inches wide, I found it quite an effort to contort myself sufficiently to achieve the back seat, and once there found there was very little head-room (the seat being some inches higher than the driving seat), but in this respect I must make it clear that, being over 6ft. 3in and weighing 15 stone, I find this a fault in most vehicles, many very much larger than the Escort.

The space for luggage, guns, rods and/or game, with the rear seat up, is 2ft., by 4ft., and with the seat folded away, a floor space of 3ft. 9in. by 4ft. enables a load of 41 c.ft. weighing up to 5cwt. to be carried.

The rear of the Escort is very well designed, being an upward-lifting window (in one piece, giving excellent vision) which can be raised above the horizontal position where it is supported by a self-locking strut. The lower half or tail-gate can then be dropped downwards to rest against rubber cushions on the rear bumpers, thus giving admirable loading access.

I think my escort (the charming young man of para 2) was somewhat surprised when I backed smartly off the road near Walton Bridge, down a short, fairly steep bank, to career round a rough meadow in second gear, but with its 8 inch clearance and 7ft. 3in. wheelbase there is little danger of "grounding" the Escort and we regained the road without incident or difficulty, to the young man's evident relief. In short, at its price (£434 plus £218 P.T.), the Escort is a very sound, unpretencious and workmanlike little vehicle.

By Way of Introduction

by Taproot

The author, punt-gunner, shoulder-gunner, game shot, fisherman, and straddler of horses is, in fact, a hard-working farmer whose articles "in another place" attracted our notice. So much so, that we have invited him to write a weekly column for a "spell of time" except that week of the month when "Lore of the Land" appears.—Editor.

FOR some years now my farming sideline has been a weekly article in a local paper. Prices, the weather, new machines, and sundry small adventures provide, week in week out, a regular if not very exciting flow of copy. I keep my ears open in markets and inns. And as my identity is masked by a discreet if earthy pseudonym, I receive large earfuls, from time to time, of the kind of criticism a man hardly ever gets to his face.

Another judgment—a false one by the way—that really did sting is now six or seven years old, but still rankling. Pick-up baling had just reached the stage in our district when it was on offer for the first time as a contract service. I was so pleased at my first taste of it that I remember sitting on a bale in the midst of a kind of hay-built Stonehenge and writing a cheque in payment on the field.

Meanwhile, my men were busy standing the bales on end. It seemed to me hay making without tears—a few days standing to sweat out—no worry at all as high density bales are weather-proof—then a day's carting and the job done.

But that night it rained and blew. Next morning, my shorn ampitheatre was a mass of fallen dolmens. The wet had penetrated every prostrate bale although those still standing took no harm. Today, of course, a sounder bale-stooking technique has been worked out.

Distinterested Praise

The next week, at a farm sale, I fell into talk with a bailiff who had read my piece and actually approved of it. Emboldened by a little disinterested praise, I asked him who he thought the author might be. He replied: "He's a toff, I understand, who has a posh place up country."

Now, to give the impression of lodge gates and a laurelled drive may have its points. I happen, though, to write from a very different standpoint. At the outset of my proposed weekly column for this journal, I should like to make my "angle" absolutely clear. For nearly twenty years I have been a tenant farmer in a not-very-grand way of business, relying entirely on farming for a living—apart, that is, from a few pounds annually earned from equally modest journalism.

The only suggestion of affluence is the presence on the farm, and sometimes in my writing of one or two fastish-looking thoroughbreds purchased as youngsters for never more than sixty or seventy pounds apiece. The present apple of my eye fell under the hammer for only eleven guineas as a yearling.

To get back to farming, my present holding is 180 acres rented at only one pound an acre. This admittedly low figure represents a state of mixed blessedness. The farm would probably pay both landlord and tenant better if there were higher rent and more amenity.

It means for me a policy of regular if cautiously introduced improvement. Every year money has to be spent on such things as land drainage, extension of water supplies, or improvements to piggeries. There is constant worry from the question: "Shall I make a grand splash this year and bring everything slap up to date? Or shall I continue to creep forward on the instalment system?" Until a cheaper source of credit for agricultural improvements is available I expect I shall stick to the latter course.

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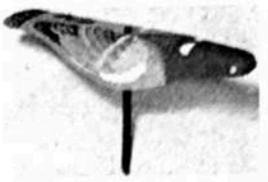

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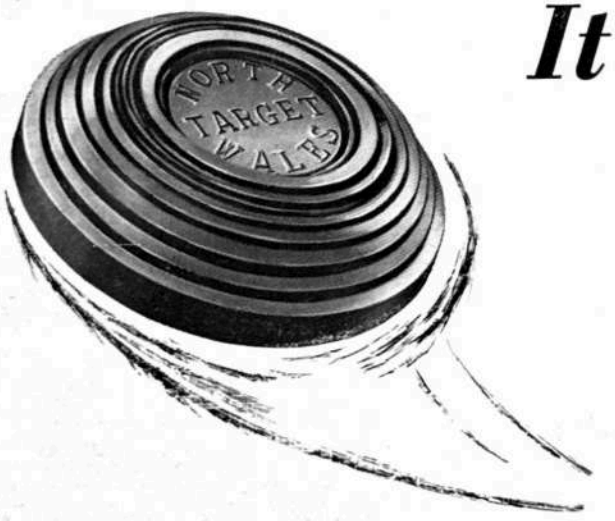

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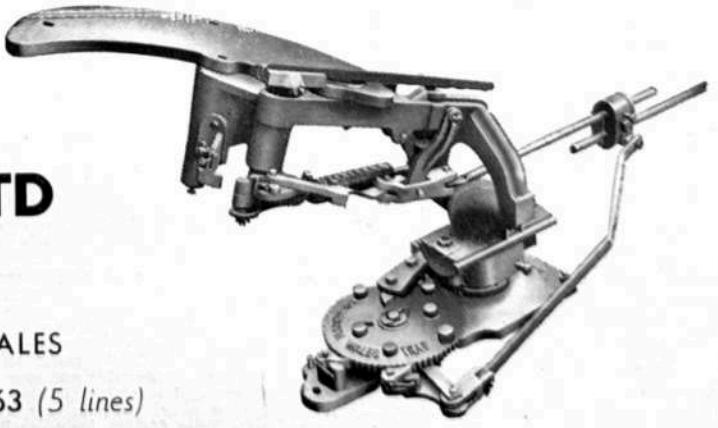

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